A MOUNTAIN WOMAN

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From the Papers of

Frederick J. Mosher

A Mountain Woman

A

Mountain Woman

By

Elia W. Peattie

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To

My best Friend, and kindest Critic,

My Husband.

FOREWORD.

Most of the tales in this little book have been printed before. "A Mountain Woman" appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, as did "The Three Johns" and "A Resuscitation." "Jim Lancy's Waterloo" was printed in the *Cosmopolitan*, "A Michigan Man" in *Lippincott's*, and "Up the Gulch" in *Two Tales*. The courtesy of these periodicals in permitting the stories to be republished is cordially acknowledged.

E. W. P.

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A Mountain Woman

IF Leroy Brainard had not had such a respect for literature, he would have written a book.

As it was, he played at being an architect — and succeeded in being a charming fellow. My sister Jessica never lost an opportunity of laughing at his endeavors as an architect.

"You can build an enchanting villa, but what would you do with a cathedral?"

"I shall never have a chance at a cathedral," he would reply. "And, besides, it always seems to me so material and so impertinent to build a little structure of stone and wood in which to worship God!"

You see what he was like? He was frivolous, yet one could never tell when he would become eloquently earnest.

Brainard went off suddenly Westward one day. I suspected that Jessica was at the

bottom of it, but I asked no questions; and I did not hear from him for months. Then I got a letter from Colorado.

"I have married a mountain woman," he wrote. "None of your puny breed of modern femininity, but a remnant left over from the heroic ages, — a primitive woman, grand and vast of spirit, capable of true and steadfast wifehood. No sophistry about her; no knowledge even that there is sophistry. Heavens! man, do you remember the rondeaux and triolets I used to write to those pretty creatures back East? It would take a Saga man of the old Norseland to write for my mountain woman. If I were an artist, I would paint her with the north star in her locks and her feet on purple cloud. I suppose you are at the Pier. I know you usually are at this season. At any rate, I shall direct this letter thither, and will follow close after it. I want my wife to see something of life. And I want her to meet your sister."

"Dear me!" cried Jessica, when I read the letter to her; "I don't know that I care to meet anything quite so gigantic as that

mountain woman. I'm one of the puny breed of modern femininity, you know. I don't think my nerves can stand the encounter."

"Why, Jessica!" I protested. She blushed a little.

"Don't think bad of me, Victor. But, you see, I've a little scrap-book of those triolets upstairs." Then she burst into a peal of irresistible laughter. "I'm not laughing because I am piqued," she said frankly. "Though any one will admit that it is rather irritating to have a man who left you in a blasted condition recover with such extraordinary promptness. As a philanthropist, one of course rejoices, but as a woman, Victor, it must be admitted that one has a right to feel annoyed. But, honestly, I am not ungenerous, and I am going to do him a favor. I shall write, and urge him not to bring his wife here. A primitive woman, with the north star in her hair, would look well down there in the Casino eating a pineapple ice, would n't she? It's all very well to have a soul, you know; but it won't keep you from looking like a guy among women who have good dressmakers.

I shudder at the thought of what the poor thing will suffer if he brings her here."

Jessica wrote, as she said she would; but, for all that, a fortnight later she was walking down the wharf with the "mountain woman," and I was sauntering beside Leroy. At dinner Jessica gave me no chance to talk with our friend's wife, and I only caught the quiet contralto tones of her voice now and then contrasting with Jessica's vivacious soprano. A drizzling rain came up from the east with nightfall. Little groups of shivering men and women sat about in the parlors at the card-tables, and one blond woman sang love songs. The Brainards were tired with their journey, and left us early. When they were gone, Jessica burst into eulogy.

"That is the first woman," she declared, "I ever met who would make a fit heroine for a book."

"Then you will not feel under obligations to educate her, as you insinuated the other day?"

"Educate her! I only hope she will help me to unlearn some of the things I

know. I never saw such simplicity. It is antique!"

"You're sure it's not mere vacuity?"

"Victor! How can you? But you have n't talked with her. You must to-morrow. Good-night." She gathered up her trailing skirts and started down the corridor. Suddenly she turned back. "For Heaven's sake!" she whispered, in an awed tone, "I never even noticed what she had on!"

The next morning early we made up a riding party, and I rode with Mrs. Brainard. She was as tall as I, and sat in her saddle as if quite unconscious of her animal. The road stretched hard and inviting under our horses' feet. The wind smelled salt. The sky was ragged with gray masses of cloud scudding across the blue. I was beginning to glow with exhilaration, when suddenly my companion drew in her horse.

"If you do not mind, we will go back," she said.

Her tone was dejected. I thought she was tired.

"Oh, no!" she protested, when I apologized for my thoughtlessness in bringing her

so far. "I'm not tired. I can ride all day. Where I come from, we have to ride if we want to go anywhere; but here there seems to be no particular place to — to reach."

"Are you so utilitarian?" I asked, laughingly. "Must you always have some reason for everything you do? I do so many things just for the mere pleasure of doing them, I'm afraid you will have a very poor opinion of me."

"That is not what I mean," she said, flushing, and turning her large gray eyes on me. "You must not think I have a reason for everything I do." She was very earnest, and it was evident that she was unacquainted with the art of making conversation. "But what I mean," she went on, "is that there is no place — no end — to reach." She looked back over her shoulder toward the west, where the trees marked the sky line, and an expression of loss and dissatisfaction came over her face. "You see," she said, apologetically, "I'm used to different things — to the mountains. I have never been where I could not see them before in my life."

"Ah, I see! I suppose it is odd to look up and find them not there."

"It's like being lost, this not having anything around you. At least, I mean," she continued slowly, as if her thought could not easily put itself in words, — "I mean it seems as if a part of the world had been taken down. It makes you feel lonesome, as if you were living after the world had begun to die."

"You 'll get used to it in a few days. It seems very beautiful to me here. And then you will have so much life to divert you."

"Life? But there is always that everywhere."

"I mean men and women."

"Oh! Still, I am not used to them. I think I might be not — not very happy with them. They might think me queer. I think I would like to show your sister the mountains."

"She has seen them often."

"Oh, she told me. But I don't mean those pretty green hills such as we saw coming here. They are not like my mountains. I like mountains that go beyond the clouds,

with terrible shadows in the hollows, and belts of snow lying in the gorges where the sun cannot reach, and the snow is blue in the sunshine, or shining till you think it is silver, and the mist so wonderful all about it, changing each moment and drifting up and down, that you cannot tell what name to give the colors. These mountains of yours here in the East are so quiet; mine are shouting all the time, with the pines and the rivers. The echoes are so loud in the valley that sometimes, when the wind is rising, we can hardly hear a man talk unless he raises his voice. There are four cataracts near where I live, and they all have different voices, just as people do; and one of them is happy — a little white cataract — and it falls where the sun shines earliest, and till night it is shining. But the others only get the sun now and then, and they are more noisy and cruel. One of them is always in the shadow, and the water looks black. That is partly because the rocks all underneath it are black. It falls down twenty great ledges in a gorge with black sides, and a white mist dances all over it at every leap.

I tell father the mist is the ghost of the waters. No man ever goes there ; it is too cold. The chill strikes through one, and makes your heart feel as if you were dying. But all down the side of the mountain, toward the south and the west, the sun shines on the granite and draws long points of light out of it. Father tells me soldiers marching look that way when the sun strikes on their bayonets. Those are the kind of mountains I mean, Mr. Grant."

She was looking at me with her face transfigured, as if it, like the mountains she told me of, had been lying in shadow, and waiting for the dazzling dawn.

"I had a terrible dream once," she went on ; "the most terrible dream ever I had. I dreamt that the mountains had all been taken down, and that I stood on a plain to which there was no end. The sky was burning up, and the grass scorched brown from the heat, and it was twisting as if it were in pain. And animals, but no other person save myself, only wild things, were crouching and looking up at that sky. They could not run because there was no place to which to go."

"You were having a vision of the last man," I said. "I wonder myself sometimes whether this old globe of ours is going to collapse suddenly and take us with her, or whether we will disappear through slow disastrous ages of fighting and crushing, with hunger and blight to help us to the end. And then, at the last, perhaps, some luckless fellow, stronger than the rest, will stand amid the ribs of the rotting earth and go mad."

The woman's eyes were fixed on me, large and luminous. "Yes," she said; "he would go mad from the lonesomeness of it. He would be afraid to be left alone like that with God. No one would want to be taken into God's secrets."

"And our last man," I went on, "would have to stand there on that swaying wreck till even the sound of the crumbling earth ceased. And he would try to find a voice and would fail, because silence would have come again. And then the light would go out —"

The shudder that crept over her made me stop, ashamed of myself.

"You talk like father," she said, with a long-drawn breath. Then she looked up suddenly at the sun shining through a rift in those reckless gray clouds, and put out one hand as if to get it full of the headlong rollicking breeze. "But the earth is not dying," she cried. "It is well and strong, and it likes to go round and round among all the other worlds. It likes the sun and moon; they are all good friends; and it likes the people who live on it. Maybe it is they instead of the fire within who keep it warm; or maybe it is warm just from always going, as we are when we run. We are young, you and I, Mr. Grant, and Leroy, and your beautiful sister, and the world is young too!" Then she laughed a strong splendid laugh, which had never had the joy taken out of it with drawing-room restrictions; and I laughed too, and felt that we had become very good companions indeed, and found myself warming to the joy of companionship as I had not since I was a boy at school.

That afternoon the four of us sat at a table in the Casino together. The Casino,

as every one knows, is a place to amuse yourself. If you have a duty, a mission, or an aspiration, you do not take it there with you, it would be so obviously out of place; if poverty is ahead of you, you forget it; if you have brains, you hasten to conceal them; they would be a serious encumbrance.

There was a bubbling of conversation, a rustle and flutter such as there always is where there are many women. All the place was gay with flowers and with gowns as bright as the flowers. I remembered the apprehensions of my sister, and studied Leroy's wife to see how she fitted into this highly colored picture. She was the only woman in the room who seemed to wear draperies. The jaunty slash and cut of fashionable attire were missing in the long brown folds of cloth that enveloped her figure. I felt certain that even from Jessica's standpoint she could not be called a guy. Picturesque she might be, past the point of convention, but she was not ridiculous.

"Judith takes all this very seriously," said Leroy, laughingly. "I suppose she would take even Paris seriously."

His wife smiled over at him. "Leroy says I am melancholy," she said, softly; "but I am always telling him that I am happy. He thinks I am melancholy because I do not laugh. I got out of the way of it by being so much alone. You only laugh to let some one else know you are pleased. When you are alone there is no use in laughing. It would be like explaining something to yourself."

"You are a philosopher, Judith. Mr. Max Müller would like to know you."

"Is he a friend of yours, dear?"

Leroy blushed, and I saw Jessica curl her lip as she noticed the blush. She laid her hand on Mrs. Brainard's arm.

"Have you always been very much alone?" she inquired.

"I was born on the ranch, you know; and father was not fond of leaving it. Indeed, now he says he will never again go out of sight of it. But you can go a long journey without doing that; for it lies on a plateau in the valley, and it can be seen from three different mountain passes. Mother died there, and for that reason and

others — father has had a strange life — he never wanted to go away. He brought a lady from Pennsylvania to teach me. She had wonderful learning, but she did n't make very much use of it. I thought if I had learning I would not waste it reading books. I would use it to — to live with. Father had a library, but I never cared for it. He was forever at books too. Of course," she hastened to add, noticing the look of mortification deepen on her husband's face, "I like books very well if there is nothing better at hand. But I always said to Mrs. Windsor — it was she who taught me — why read what other folk have been thinking when you can go out and think yourself? Of course one prefers one's own thoughts, just as one prefers one's own ranch, or one's own father."

"Then you are sure to like New York when you go there to live," cried Jessica; "for there you will find something to make life entertaining all the time. No one need fall back on books there."

"I'm not sure. I'm afraid there must be such dreadful crowds of people. Of course

I should try to feel that they were all like me, with just the same sort of fears, and that it was ridiculous for us to be afraid of each other, when at heart we all meant to be kind."

Jessica fairly wrung her hands. "Heavens!" she cried. "I said you would like New York. I am afraid, my dear, that it will break your heart!"

"Oh," said Mrs. Brainard, with what was meant to be a gentle jest, "no one can break my heart except Leroy. I should not care enough about any one else, you know."

The compliment was an exquisite one. I felt the blood creep to my own brain in a sort of vicarious rapture, and I avoided looking at Leroy lest he should dislike to have me see the happiness he must feel. The simplicity of the woman seemed to invigorate me as the cool air of her mountains might if it blew to me on some bright dawn, when I had come, fevered and sick of soul, from the city.

When we were alone, Jessica said to me: "That man has too much vanity, and he

thinks it is sensitiveness. He is going to imagine that his wife makes him suffer. There 's no one so brutally selfish as your sensitive man. He wants every one to live according to his ideas, or he immediately begins suffering. That friend of yours has n't the courage of his convictions. He is going to be ashamed of the very qualities that made him love his wife."

There was a hop that night at the hotel, quite an unusual affair as to elegance, given in honor of a woman from New York, who wrote a novel a month.

Mrs. Brainard looked so happy that night when she came in the parlor, after the music had begun, that I felt a moisture gather in my eyes just because of the beauty of her joy, and the forced vivacity of the women about me seemed suddenly coarse and insincere. Some wonderful red stones, brilliant as rubies, glittered in among the diaphanous black driftings of her dress. She asked me if the stones were not very pretty, and said she gathered them in one of her mountain river-beds.

"But the gown?" I said. "Surely, you

do not gather gowns like that in river-beds, or pick them off mountain-pines?"

"But you can get them in Denver. Father always sent to Denver for my finery. He was very particular about how I looked. You see, I was all he had —" She broke off, her voice faltering.

"Come over by the window," I said, to change her thought. "I have something to repeat to you. It is a song of Sydney Lanier's. I think he was the greatest poet that ever lived in America, though not many agree with me. But he is my dear friend anyway, though he is dead, and I never saw him; and I want you to hear some of his words."

I led her across to an open window. The dancers were whirling by us. The waltz was one of those melancholy ones which speak the spirit of the dance more eloquently than any merry melody can. The sound of the sea booming beyond in the darkness came to us, and long paths of light, now red, now green, stretched toward the distant light-house. These were the lines I repeated: —

"What heartache — ne'er a hill!
Inexorable, vapid, vague, and chill
The drear sand levels drain my spirit low.
With one poor word they tell me all they know;
Whereat their stupid tongues, to tease my pain,
Do drawl it o'er and o'er again.
They hurt my heart with griefs I cannot name:
Always the same — the same."

But I got no further. I felt myself moved with a sort of passion which did not seem to come from within, but to be communicated to me from her. A certain unfamiliar happiness pricked through with pain thrilled me, and I heard her whispering, —

"Do not go on, do not go on! I cannot stand it to-night!"

"Hush," I whispered back; "come out for a moment!" We stole into the dusk without, and stood there trembling. I swayed with her emotion. There was a long silence. Then she said: "Father may be walking alone now by the black cataract. That is where he goes when he is sad. I can see how lonely he looks among those little twisted pines that grow from the rock. And he will be remembering all the evenings

we walked there together, and all the things we said." I did not answer. Her eyes were still on the sea.

"What was the name of the man who wrote that verse you just said to me?"

I told her.

"And he is dead? Did they bury him in the mountains? No? I wish I could have put him where he could have heard those four voices calling down the canyon."

"Come back in the house," I said; "you must come, indeed," I said, as she shrank from re-entering.

Jessica was dancing like a fairy with Leroy. They both saw us and smiled as we came in, and a moment later they joined us. I made my excuses and left my friends to Jessica's care. She was a sort of social tyrant wherever she was, and I knew one word from her would insure the popularity of our friends — not that they needed the intervention of any one. Leroy had been a sort of drawing-room pet since before he stopped wearing knickerbockers.

"He is at his best in a drawing-room," said Jessica, "because there he deals with

theory and not with action. And he has such beautiful theories that the women, who are all idealists, adore him."

The next morning I awoke with a conviction that I had been idling too long. I went back to the city and brushed the dust from my desk. Then each morning, I, as Jessica put it, "formed public opinion" to the extent of one column a day in the columns of a certain enterprising morning journal.

Brainard said I had treated him shabbily to leave upon the heels of his coming. But a man who works for his bread and butter must put a limit to his holiday. It is different when you only work to add to your general picturesqueness. That is what I wrote Leroy, and it was the unkindest thing I ever said to him; and why I did it I do not know to this day. I was glad, though, when he failed to answer the letter. It gave me a more reasonable excuse for feeling out of patience with him.

The days that followed were very dull. It was hard to get back into the way of working. I was glad when Jessica came

home to set up our little establishment and to join in the autumn gayeties. Brainard brought his wife to the city soon after, and went to housekeeping in an odd sort of a way.

"I could n't see anything in the place save curios," Jessica reported, after her first call on them. "I suppose there is a cooking-stove somewhere, and maybe even a pantry with pots in it. But all I saw was Alaska totems and Navajo blankets. They have as many skins around on the floor and couches as would have satisfied an ancient Briton. And everybody was calling there. You know Mr. Brainard runs to curios in selecting his friends as well as his furniture. The parlors were full this afternoon of abnormal people, that is to say, with folks one reads about. I was the only one there who had n't done something. I guess it's because I am too healthy."

"How did Mrs. Brainard like such a motley crew?"

"She was wonderful — perfectly wonderful! Those insulting creatures were all studying her, and she knew it. But her

dignity was perfect, and she looked as proud as a Sioux chief. She listened to every one, and they all thought her so bright."

"Brainard must have been tremendously proud of her."

"Oh, he was — of her and his Chilcat portières."

Jessica was there often, but — well, I was busy. At length, however, I was forced to go. Jessica refused to make any further excuses for me. The rooms were filled with small celebrities.

"We are the only nonentities," whispered Jessica, as she looked around; "it will make us quite distinguished."

We went to speak to our hostess. She stood beside her husband, looking taller than ever; and her face was white. Her long red gown of clinging silk was so peculiar as to give one the impression that she was dressed in character. It was easy to tell that it was one of Leroy's fancies. I hardly heard what she said, but I know she reproached me gently for not having been to see them. I had no further word with her till some one led her to the piano, and she paused to say, —

"That poet you spoke of to me — the one you said was a friend of yours — he is my friend now too, and I have learned to sing some of his songs. I am going to sing one now." She seemed to have no timidity at all, but stood quietly, with a half smile, while a young man with a Russian name played a strange minor prelude. Then she sang, her voice a wonderful contralto, cold at times, and again lit up with gleams of passion. The music itself was fitful, now full of joy, now tender, and now sad:

"Look off, dear love, across the sallow sands,
And mark yon meeting of the sun and sea,
How long they kiss in sight of all the lands,
Ah! longer, longer we."

"She has a genius for feeling, has n't she?" Leroy whispered to me.

"A genius for feeling!" I repeated, angrily. "Man, she has a heart and a soul and a brain, if that is what you mean! I should n't think you would be able to look at her from the standpoint of a critic."

Leroy shrugged his shoulders and went off. For a moment I almost hated him for

not feeling more resentful. I felt as if he owed it to his wife to take offence at my foolish speech.

It was evident that the "mountain woman" had become the fashion. I read reports in the papers about her unique receptions. I saw her name printed conspicuously among the list of those who attended all sorts of dinners and musicales and evenings among the set that affected intellectual pursuits. She joined a number of women's clubs of an exclusive kind.

"She is doing whatever her husband tells her to," said Jessica. "Why, the other day I heard her ruining her voice on 'Siegfried'!"

But from day to day I noticed a difference in her. She developed a terrible activity. She took personal charge of the affairs of her house; she united with Leroy in keeping the house filled with guests; she got on the board of a hospital for little children, and spent a part of every day among the cots where the sufferers lay. Now and then when we spent a quiet evening alone with her and Leroy, she sewed continually on little white night-gowns for these poor babies.

She used her carriage to take the most extraordinary persons riding.

"In the cause of health," Leroy used to say, "I ought to have the carriage fumigated after every ride Judith takes, for she is always accompanied by some one who looks as if he or she should go into quarantine."

One night, when he was chaffing her in this way, she flung her sewing suddenly from her and sprang to her feet, as if she were going to give way to a burst of girlish temper. Instead of that, a stream of tears poured from her eyes, and she held out her trembling hands toward Jessica.

"He does not know," she sobbed. "He cannot understand."

One memorable day Leroy hastened over to us while we were still at breakfast to say that Judith was ill,—strangely ill. All night long she had been muttering to herself as if in a delirium. Yet she answered lucidly all questions that were put to her.

"She begs for Miss Grant. She says over and over that she 'knows,' whatever that may mean."

When Jessica came home she told me she

did not know. She only felt that a tumult of impatience was stirring in her friend.

"There is something majestic about her,—something epic. I feel as if she were making me live a part in some great drama, the end of which I cannot tell. She is suffering, but I cannot tell why she suffers."

Weeks went on without an abatement in this strange illness. She did not keep her bed. Indeed, she neglected few of her usual occupations. But her hands were burning, and her eyes grew bright with that wild sort of lustre one sees in the eyes of those who give themselves up to strange drugs or manias. She grew whimsical, and formed capricious friendships, only to drop them.

And then one day she closed her house to all acquaintances, and sat alone continually in her room, with her hands clasped in her lap, and her eyes swimming with the emotions that never found their way to her tongue.

Brainard came to the office to talk with me about her one day. "I am a very miserable man, Grant," he said. "I am afraid I have lost my wife's regard. Oh, don't tell me

it is partly my fault. I know it well enough. And I know you have n't had a very good opinion of me lately. But I am remorseful enough now, God knows. And I would give my life to see her as she was when I found her first among the mountains. Why, she used to climb them like a strong man, and she was forever shouting and singing. And she had peopled every spot with strange modern mythological creatures. Her father is an old dreamer, and she got the trick from him. They had a little telescope on a great knoll in the centre of the valley, just where it commanded a long path of stars, and they used to spend nights out there when the frost literally fell in flakes. When I think how hardy and gay she was, how full of courage and life, and look at her now, so feverish and broken, I feel as if I should go mad. You know I never meant to do her any harm. Tell me that much, Grant."

"I think you were very egotistical for a while, Brainard, and that is a fact. And you did n't appreciate how much her nature demanded. But I do not think you are responsible for your wife's present condition.

If there is any comfort in that statement, you are welcome to it."

"But you don't mean — " he got no further.

"I mean that your wife may have her reservations, just as we all have, and I am paying her high praise when I say it. You are not so narrow, Leroy, as to suppose for a moment that the only sort of passion a woman is capable of is that which she entertains for a man. How do I know what is going on in your wife's soul? But it is nothing which even an idealist of women, such as I am, old fellow, need regret."

How glad I was afterward that I spoke those words. They exercised a little restraint, perhaps, on Leroy when the day of his terrible trial came. They made him wrestle with the demon of suspicion that strove to possess him. I was sitting in my office, lagging dispiritedly over my work one day, when the door burst open and Brainard stood beside me. Brainard, I say, and yet in no sense the man I had known, — not a hint in this pale creature, whose breath struggled through chattering teeth,

and whose hands worked in uncontrollable spasms, of the nonchalant elegant I had known. Not a glimpse to be seen in those angry and determined eyes of the gayly selfish spirit of my holiday friend.

"She's gone!" he gasped. "Since yesterday. And I'm here to ask you what you think now? And what you know."

A panorama of all shameful possibilities for one black moment floated before me. I remember this gave place to a wave, cold as death, that swept from head to foot; then Brainard's hands fell heavily on my shoulders.

"Thank God at least for this much," he said, hoarsely; "I did n't know at first but I had lost both friend and wife. But I see you know nothing. And indeed in my heart I knew all the time that you did not. Yet I had to come to you with my anger. And I remembered how you defended her. What explanation can you offer now?"

I got him to sit down after a while and tell me what little there was to tell. He had been away for a day's shooting, and when he returned he found only the per-

plexed servants at home. A note was left for him. He showed it to me.

"There are times," it ran, "when we must do as we must, not as we would. I am going to do something I have been driven to do since I left my home. I do not leave any message of love for you, because you would not care for it from a woman so weak as I. But it is so easy for you to be happy that I hope in a little while you will forget the wife who yielded to an influence past resisting. It may be madness, but I am not great enough to give it up. I tried to make the sacrifice, but I could not. I tried to be as gay as you, and to live your sort of life; but I could not do it. Do not make the effort to forgive me. You will be happier if you simply hold me in the contempt I deserve."

I read the letter over and over. I do not know that I believe that the spirit of inanimate things can permeate to the intelligence of man. I am sure I always laughed at such ideas. Yet holding that note with its shameful seeming words, I felt a consciousness that it was written in purity and love.

And then before my eyes there came a scene so vivid that for a moment the office with its familiar furniture was obliterated. What I saw was a long firm road, green with midsummer luxuriance. The leisurely thudding of my horse's feet sounded in my ears. Beside me was a tall, black-robed figure. I saw her look back with that expression of deprivation at the sky line. "It's like living after the world has begun to die," said the pensive minor voice. "It seems as if part of the world had been taken down."

"Brainard," I yelled, "come here! I have it. Here's your explanation. I can show you a new meaning for every line of this letter. Man, she has gone to the mountains. She has gone to worship her own gods!"

Two weeks later I got a letter from Brainard, dated from Colorado.

"Old man," it said, "you're right. She is here. I found my mountain woman here where the four voices of her cataracts had been calling to her. I saw her the moment our mules rounded the road that commands the valley. We had been riding all night

and were drenched with cold dew, hungry to desperation, and my spirits were of lead. Suddenly we got out from behind the granite wall, and there she was, standing, where I had seen her so often, beside the little waterfall that she calls the happy one. She was looking straight up at the billowing mist that dipped down the mountain, mammoth saffron rolls of it, plunging so madly from the impetus of the wind that one marvelled how it could be noiseless. Ah, you do not know Judith! That strange, unsophisticated, sometimes awkward woman you saw bore no more resemblance to my mountain woman than I to Hercules. How strong and beautiful she looked standing there wrapped in an ecstasy! It was my primitive woman back in her primeval world. How the blood leaped in me! All my old romance, so different from the common love-histories of most men, was there again within my reach! All the mystery, the poignant happiness were mine again. Do not hold me in contempt because I show you my heart. You saw my misery. Why should I grudge you a glimpse of my happiness? She saw me

when I touched her hand, not before, so wrapped was she. But she did not seem surprised. Only in her splendid eyes there came a large content. She pointed to the dancing little white fall. 'I thought something wonderful was going to happen,' she whispered, 'for it has been laughing so.'

"I shall not return to New York. I am going to stay here with my mountain woman, and I think perhaps I shall find out what life means here sooner than I would back there with you. I shall learn to see large things large and small things small. Judith says to tell you and Miss Grant that the four voices are calling for you every day in the valley.

"Yours in fullest friendship,

"LEROY BRAINARD."

Jim Lancy's Waterloo

Jim Lancy's Waterloo

"WE must get married before time to put in crops," he wrote. "We must make a success of the farm the first year, for luck. Could you manage to be ready to come out West by the last of February? After March opens there will be no let-up, and I do not see how I could get away. Make it February, Annie dear. A few weeks more or less can make no difference to you, but they make a good deal of difference to me."

The woman to whom this was written read it with something like anger. "I don't believe he's so impatient for me!" she said to herself. "What he wants is to get the crops in on time." But she changed the date of their wedding, and made it February.

Their wedding journey was only from the Illinois village where she lived to their Nebraska farm. They had never been much

together, and they had much to say to each other.

"Farming won't come hard to you," Jim assured her. "All one needs to farm with is brains."

"What a success you'll make of it!" she cried saucily.

"I wish I had my farm clear," Jim went on; "but that's more than any one has around me. I'm no worse off than the rest. We've got to pay off the mortgage, Annie."

"Of course we must. We'll just do without till we get the mortgage lifted. Hard work will do anything, I guess. And I'm not afraid to work, Jim, though I've never had much experience."

Jim looked out of the window a long time, at the gentle undulations of the brown Iowa prairie. His eyes seem to pierce beneath the sod, to the swelling buds of the yet invisible grass. He noticed how disdainfully the rains of the new year beat down the grasses of the year that was gone. It opened to his mind a vision of the season's possibilities. For a moment, even amid the smoke of the car, he seemed to scent

clover, and hear the stiff swishing of the corn and the dull burring of the bees.

"I wish sometimes," he said, leaning forward to look at his bride, "that I had been born something else than a farmer. But I can no more help farming, Annie, than a bird can help singing, or a bee making honey. I did n't take to farming. I was simply born with a hoe in my hand."

"I don't know a blessed thing about it," Annie confessed. "But I made up my mind that a farm with you was better than a town without you. That's all there is to it, as far as I am concerned."

Jim Lancy slid his arm softly about her waist, unseen by the other passengers. Annie looked up apprehensively, to see if any one was noticing. But they were eating their lunches. It was a common coach on which they were riding. There was a Pullman attached to the train, and Annie had secretly thought that, as it was their wedding journey, it might be more becoming to take it. But Jim had made no suggestion about it. What he said later explained the reason.

"I would have liked to have brought you a fine present," he said. "It seemed shabby to come with nothing but that little ring. But I put everything I had on our home, you know. And yet, I'm sure you'll think it poor enough after what you've been used to. You'll forgive me for only bringing the ring, my dear?"

"But you brought me something better," Annie whispered. She was a foolish little girl. "You brought me love, you know." Then they rode in silence for a long time. Both of them were new to the phraseology of love. Their simple compliments to each other were almost ludicrous. But any one who might have chanced to overhear them would have been charmed, for they betrayed an innocence as beautiful as an unclouded dawn.

Annie tried hard not to be depressed by the treeless stretches of the Nebraska plains.

"This is different from Illinois," she ventured once, gently; "it is even different from Iowa."

"Yes, yes," cried Jim, enthusiastically, "it

is different! It is the finest country in the world! You never feel shut in. You can always see off. I feel at home after I get in Nebraska. I'd choke back where you live, with all those little gullies and the trees everywhere. It's a mystery to me how farmers have patience to work there."

Annie opened her eyes. There was evidently more than one way of looking at a question. The farm-houses seemed very low and mean to her, as she looked at them from the window. There were no fences, excepting now and then the inhospitable barbed wire. The door-yards were bleak to her eyes, without the ornamental shrubbery which every farmer in her part of the country was used to tending. The cattle stood unshedded in their corrals. The reapers and binders stood rusting in the dull drizzle.

"How shiftless!" cried Annie, indignantly. "What do these men mean by letting their machinery lie out that way? I should think one winter of lying out would hurt it more than three summers of using."

"It does. But sheds are not easily had. Lumber is dear."

"But I should think it would be economy even then."

"Yes," he said, "perhaps. But we all do that way out here. It takes some money for a man to be economical with. Some of us have n't even that much."

There was a six-mile ride from the station. The horses were waiting, hitched up to a serviceable light wagon, and driven by the "help." He was a thin young man, with red hair, and he blushed vicariously for Jim and Annie, who were really too entertained with each other, and at the idea of the new life opening up before them, to think anything about blushing. At the station, a number of men insisted on shaking hands with Jim, and being introduced to his wife. They were all bearded, as if shaving were an unnecessary labor, and their trousers were tucked in dusty top-boots, none of which had ever seen blacking. Annie had a sense of these men seeming unwashed, or as if they had slept in their clothes. But they had kind voices, and their eyes were very friendly. So she shook hands with them all with heartiness, and asked them to drive out and bring their womenkind.

"I am going to make up my mind not to be lonesome," she declared; "but, all the same, I shall want to see some women."

Annie had got safe on the high seat of the wagon, and was balancing her little feet on the inclined foot-rest, when a woman came running across the street, calling aloud, —

"Mr. Lancy! Mr. Lancy! You're not going to drive away without introducing me to your wife!"

She was a thin little woman, with movements as nervous and as graceless as those of a grasshopper. Her dun-colored garments seemed to have all the hue bleached out of them with wind and weather. Her face was brown and wrinkled, and her bright eyes flashed restlessly, deep in their sockets. Two front teeth were conspicuously missing; and her faded hair was blown in wisps about her face. Jim performed the introduction, and Annie held out her hand. It was a pretty hand, delicately gloved in dove color. The woman took it in her own, and after she had shaken it, held it for a silent moment, looking at it. Then she almost threw

it from her. The eyes which she lifted to scan the bright young face above her had something like agony in them. Annie blushed under this fierce scrutiny, and the woman, suddenly conscious of her demeanor, forced a smile to her lips.

"I'll come out an' see yeh," she said, in cordial tones. "May be, as a new housekeeper, you'll like a little advice. You've a nice place, an' I wish yeh luck."

"Thank you. I'm sure I'll need advice," cried Annie, as they drove off. Then she said to Jim, "Who is that old woman?"

"Old woman? Why, she ain't a day over thirty, Mis' Dundy ain't."

Annie looked at her husband blankly. But he was already talking of something else, and she asked no more about the woman, though all the way along the road the face seemed to follow her. It might have been this that caused the tightening about her heart. For some way her vivacity had gone; and the rest of the ride she asked no questions, but sat looking straight before her at the northward stretching road, with eyes that felt rather than saw the brown,

bare undulations, rising every now and then clean to the sky; at the side, little famished-looking houses, unacquainted with paint, disorderly yards, and endless reaches of furrowed ground, where in summer the corn had waved.

The horses needed no indication of the line to make them turn up a smooth bit of road that curved away neatly 'mid the ragged grasses. At the end of it, in a clump of puny scrub oaks, stood a square little house, in uncorniced simplicity, with blank, uncurtained windows staring out at Annie, and for a moment her eyes, blurred with the cold, seemed to see in one of them the despairing face of the woman with the wisps of faded hair blowing about her face.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Jim cried, heartily, swinging her down from her high seat, and kissing her as he did so. "This is your home, my girl, and you are as welcome to it as you would be to a palace, if I could give it to you."

Annie put up her hands to hide the trembling of her lips; and she let Jim see there were tears in her eyes as an apology for not

replying. The young man with the red hair took away the horses, and Jim, with his arm around his wife's waist, ran toward the house and threw open the door for her to enter. The intense heat of two great stoves struck in their faces; and Annie saw the big burner, erected in all its black hideousness in the middle of the front room, like a sort of household hoodoo, to be constantly propitiated, like the gods of Greece; and in the kitchen, the new range, with a distracted tea-kettle leaping on it, as if it would like to loose its fetters and race away over the prairie after its cousin, the locomotive.

It was a house of four rooms, and a glance revealed the fact that it had been provided with the necessaries.

"I think we can be very comfortable here," said Jim, rather doubtfully.

Annie saw she must make some response. "I am sure we can be more than comfortable, Jim," she replied. "We can be happy. Show me, if you please, where my room is. I must hang my cloak up in the right place so that I shall feel as if I were getting settled."

It was enough. Jim had no longer any doubts. He felt sure they were going to be happy ever afterward.

It was Annie who got the first meal; she insisted on it, though both the men wanted her to rest. And Jim had n't the heart to tell her that, as a general thing, it would not do to put two eggs in the corn-cake, and that the beafsteak was a great luxury. When he saw her about to break an egg for the coffee, however, he interfered.

"The shells of the ones you used for the cake will settle the coffee just as well," he said. "You see we have to be very careful of eggs out here at this season."

"Oh! Will the shells really settle it? This is what you must call prairie lore. I suppose out here we find out what the real relations of invention and necessity are — eh?"

Jim laughed disproportionately. He thought her wonderfully witty. And he and the help ate so much that Annie opened her eyes. She had thought there would be enough left for supper. But there was nothing left.

For the next two weeks Jim was able to be much with her; and they amused themselves by decorating the house with the bright curtainings that Annie had brought, and putting up shelves for a few pieces of china. She had two or three pictures, also, which had come from her room in her old home, and some of those useless dainty things with which some women like to litter the room.

"Most folks," Jim explained, "have to be content with one fire, and sit in the kitchen; but I thought, as this was our honeymoon, we would put on some lugs."

Annie said nothing then; but a day or two after she ventured, —

"Perhaps it would be as well now, dear, if we kept in the kitchen. I 'll keep it as bright and pleasant as I can. And, anyway, you can be more about with me when I 'm working then. We 'll lay a fire in the front-room stove, so that we can light it if anybody comes. We can just as well save that much."

Jim looked up brightly. "All right," he said. "You 're a sensible little woman. You see, every cent makes a difference.

And I want to be able to pay off five hundred dollars of that mortgage this year."

So, after that, they sat in the kitchen; and the fire was laid in the front room, against the coming of company. But no one came, and it remained unlighted.

Then the season began to show signs of opening, — bleak signs, hardly recognizable to Annie; and after that Jim was not much in the house. The weeks wore on, and spring came at last, dancing over the hills. The ground-birds began building, and at four each morning awoke Annie with their sylvan opera. The creek that ran just at the north of the house worked itself into a fury and blustered along with much noise toward the great Platte which, miles away, wallowed in its vast sandy bed. The hills flushed from brown to yellow, and from mottled green to intensest emerald, and in the superb air all the winds of heaven seemed to meet and frolic with laughter and song.

Sometimes the mornings were so beautiful that, the men being afield and Annie all

alone, she gave herself up to an ecstasy and kneeled by the little wooden bench outside the door, to say, "Father, I thank Thee," and then went about her work with all the poem of nature rhyming itself over and over in her heart.

It was on such a day as this that Mrs. Dundy kept her promise and came over to see if the young housekeeper needed any of the advice she had promised her. She had walked, because none of the horses could be spared. It had got so warm now that the fire in the kitchen heated the whole house sufficiently, and Annie had the rooms clean to exquisiteness. Mrs. Dundy looked about with envious eyes.

"How lovely!" she said.

"Do you think so?" cried Annie, in surprise. "I like it, of course, because it is home, but I don't see how you could call anything here lovely."

"Oh, you don't understand," her visitor went on. "It's lovely because it looks so happy. Some of us have — well, kind o' lost our grip."

"It's easy to do that if you don't feel

well," Annie remarked sympathetically. "I have n't felt as well as usual myself, lately. And I do get lonesome and wonder what good it does to fix up every day when there is no one to see. But that is all nonsense, and I put it out of my head."

She smoothed out the clean lawn apron with delicate touch. Mrs. Dundy followed the movement with her eyes.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, "you don't know nothin' about it yet! But you will know! You will!" and those restless, hot eyes of hers seemed to grow more restless and more hot as they looked with infinite pity at the young woman before her.

Annie thought of these words often as the summer came on, and the heat grew. Jim was seldom to be seen now. He was up at four each morning, and the last chore was not completed till nine at night. Then he threw himself in bed and lay there log-like till dawn. He was too weary to talk much, and Annie, with her heart aching for his fatigue, forbore to speak to him. She cooked the most strengthening things she could, and tried always to look fresh and

pleasant when he came in. But she often thought her pains were in vain, for he hardly rested his sunburned eyes on her. His skin got so brown that his face was strangely changed, especially as he no longer had time to shave, and had let a rough beard straggle over his cheeks and chin. On Sundays Annie would have liked to go to church, but the horses were too tired to be taken out, and she did not feel well enough to walk far; besides, Jim got no particular good out of walking over the hills unless he had a plough in his hand.

Harvest came at length, and the crop was good. There were any way from three to twenty men at the house then, and Annie cooked for all of them. Jim had tried to get some one to help her, but he had not succeeded. Annie strove to be brave, remembering that farm-women all over the country were working in similar fashion. But in spite of all she could do, the days got to seem like nightmares, and sleep between was but a brief pause in which she was always dreaming of water, and thinking that she was stooping to put fevered lips to a

running brook. Some of these men were very disgusting to Annie. Their manners were as bad as they could well be, and a coarse word came naturally to their lips.

"To be master of the soil, that is one thing," said she to herself in sickness of spirit; "but to be the slave of it is another. These men seem to have got their souls all covered with muck." She noticed that they had no idea of amusement. They had never played anything. They did not even care for base-ball. Their idea of happiness appeared to be to do nothing; and there was a good part of the year in which they were happy, — for these were not for the most part men owning farms; they were men who hired out to help the farmer. A good many of them had been farmers at one time and another, but they had failed. They all talked politics a great deal, — politics and railroads. Annie had not much patience with it all. She had great confidence in the course of things. She believed that in this country all men have a fair chance. So when it came about that the corn and the wheat, which had been raised with such

incessant toil, brought them no money, but only a loss, Annie stood aghast.

"I said the rates were ruinous," Jim said to her one night, after it was all over, and he had found out that the year's slavish work had brought him a loss of three hundred dollars; "it 's been a conspiracy from the first. The price of corn is all right. But by the time we set it down in Chicago we are out eighteen cents a bushel. It means ruin. What are we going to do? Here we had the best crop we 've had for years — but what 's the use of talking! They have us in their grip."

"I don't see how it is," Annie protested. "I should think it would be for the interest of the roads to help the people to be as prosperous as possible."

"Oh, we can't get out! And we 're bound to stay and raise grain. And they 're bound to cart it. And that 's all there is to it. They force us to stand every loss, even to the shortage that is made in transportation. The railroad companies own the elevators, and they have the cinch on us. Our grain is at their mercy. God knows how I 'm

going to raise that interest. As for the five hundred we were going to pay on the mortgage this year, Annie, we 're not in it."

Autumn was well set in by this time, and the brilliant cold sky hung over the prairies as young and fresh as if the world were not old and tired. Annie no longer could look as trim as when she first came to the little house. Her pretty wedding garments were beginning to be worn and there was no money for more. Jim would not play chess now of evenings. He was forever writing articles for the weekly paper in the adjoining town. They talked of running him for the state legislature, and he was anxious for the nomination.

"I think I might be able to stand it if I could fight 'em!" he declared; "but to sit here idle, knowing that I have been cheated out of my year's work, just as much as if I had been knocked down on the road and the money taken from me, is enough to send me to the asylum with a strait-jacket on!"

Life grew to take on tragic aspects. Annie used to find herself wondering if anywhere

in the world there were people with light hearts. For her there was no longer anticipation of joy, or present companionship, or any divertisement in the whole world. Jim read books which she did not understand, and with a few of his friends, who dropped in now and then evenings or Sundays, talked about these books in an excited manner.

She would go to her room to rest, and lying there in the darkness on the bed, would hear them speaking together, sometimes all at once, in those sternly vindictive tones men use when there is revolt in their souls.

"It is the government which is helping to impoverish us," she would hear Jim saying. "Work is money. That is to say, it is the active form of money. The wealth of a country is estimated by its power of production. And its power of production means work. It means there are so many men with so much capacity. Now the government owes it to these men to have money enough to pay them for their work; and if there is not enough money in circulation to pay to each man for

his honest and necessary work, then I say that government is in league with crime. It is trying to make defaulters of us. It has a hundred ways of cheating us. When I bought this farm and put the mortgage on it, a day's work would bring twice the results it will now. That is to say, the total at the end of the year showed my profits to be twice what they would be now, even if the railway did not stand in the way to rob us of more than we earn. So that it will take just twice as many days' work now to pay off this mortgage as it would have done at the time it was contracted. It 's a conspiracy, I tell you! Those Eastern capitalists make a science of ruining us."

He got more eloquent as time went on, and Annie, who had known him first as rather a careless talker, was astonished at the boldness of his language. But conversation was a lost art with him. He no longer talked. He harangued.

In the early spring Annie's baby was born, — a little girl with a nervous cry, who never slept long at a time, and who seemed

to wail merely from distaste at living. It was Mrs. Dundy who came over to look after the house till Annie got able to do so. Her eyes had that fever in them, as ever. She talked but little, but her touch on Annie's head was more eloquent than words. One day Annie asked for the glass, and Mrs. Dundy gave it to her. She looked in it a long time. The color was gone from her cheeks, and about her mouth there was an ugly tightening. But her eyes flashed and shone with that same — no, no, it could not be that in her face also was coming the look of half-madness! She motioned Mrs. Dundy to come to her.

"You knew it was coming," she said, brokenly, pointing to the reflection in the glass. "That first day, you knew how it would be."

Mrs. Dundy took the glass away with a gentle hand.

"How could I help knowing?" she said simply. She went into the next room, and when she returned Annie noticed that the handkerchief stuck in her belt was wet, as if it had been wept on.

A woman cannot stay long away from her home on a farm at planting time, even if it is a case of life and death. Mrs. Dundy had to go home, and Annie crept about her work with the wailing baby in her arms. The house was often disorderly now; but it could not be helped. The baby had to be cared for. It fretted so much that Jim slept apart in the mow of the barn, that his sleep might not be disturbed. It was a pleasant, dim place, full of sweet scents, and he liked to be there alone. Though he had always been an unusual worker, he worked now more like a man who was fighting off fate, than a mere toiler for bread.

The corn came up beautifully, and far as the eye could reach around their home it tossed its broad green leaves with an ocean-like swelling of sibilant sound. Jim loved it with a sort of passion. Annie loved it, too. Sometimes, at night, when her fatigue was unbearable, and her irritation wearing out both body and soul, she took her little one in her arms and walked among the corn, letting its rustling soothe the baby to sleep.

The heat of the summer was terrible. The sun came up in that blue sky like a curse, and hung there till night came to comfort the blistering earth. And one morning a terrible thing happened. Annie was standing out of doors in the shade of those miserable little oaks, ironing, when suddenly a blast of air struck her in the face, which made her look up startled. For a moment she thought, perhaps, there was a fire near in the grass. But there was none. Another blast came, hotter this time, and fifteen minutes later that wind was sweeping straight across the plain, burning and blasting. Annie went in the house to finish her ironing, and was working there, when she heard Jim's footstep on the door-sill. He could not pale because of the tan, but there was a look of agony and of anger — almost brutish anger — in his eyes. Then he looked, for a moment, at Annie standing there working patiently, and rocking the little crib with one foot, and he sat down on the door-step and buried his face in his brown arms.

The wind blew for three days. At the

end of that time every ear was withered in the stalk. The corn crop was ruined.

But there were the other crops which must be attended to, and Jim watched those with the alertness of a despairing man; and so harvest came again, and again the house was filled with men who talked their careless talk, and who were not ashamed to gorge while this one woman cooked for them. The baby lay on a quilt on the floor in the coolest part of the kitchen. Annie fed it irregularly. Sometimes she almost forgot it. As for its wailing, she had grown so used to it that she hardly heard it, any more than she did the ticking of the clock. And yet, tighter than anything else in life, was the hold that little thing had on her heart-strings. At night, after the interminable work had been finished — though in slovenly fashion — she would take it up and caress it with fierceness, and worn as she was, would bathe it and soothe it, and give it warm milk from the big tin pail.

"Lay the child down," Jim would say impatiently, while the men would tell how their wives always put the babies on the

bed and let them cry if they wanted to. Annie said nothing, but she hushed the little one with tender songs.

One day, as usual, it lay on its quilt while Annie worked. It was a terribly busy morning. She had risen at four to get the washing out of the way before the men got on hand, and there were a dozen loaves of bread to bake, and the meals to get, and the milk to attend to, and the chickens and pigs to feed. So occupied was she that she never was able to tell how long she was gone from the baby. She only knew that the heat of her own body was so great that the blood seemed to be pounding at her ears, and she staggered as she crossed the yard. But when she went at last with a cup of milk to feed the little one, it lay with clenched fists and fixed eyes, and as she lifted it, a last convulsion laid it back breathless, and its heart had ceased to beat.

Annie ran with it to her room, and tried such remedies as she had. But nothing could keep the chill from creeping over the wasted little form, — not even the heat of the day, not even the mother's agonized

embrace. Then, suddenly, Annie looked at the clock. It was time to get the dinner. She laid the piteous tiny shape straight on the bed, threw a sheet over it, and went back to the weltering kitchen to cook for those men, who came at noon and who must be fed — who must be fed.

When they were all seated at the table, Jim among them, and she had served them, she said, standing at the head of the table, with her hands on her hips: —

"I don't suppose any of you have time to do anything about it; but I thought you might like to know that the baby is dead. I would n't think of asking you to spare the horses, for I know they have to rest. But I thought, if you could make out on a cold supper, that I would go to the town for a coffin."

There was satire in the voice that stung even through the dull perceptions of these men, and Jim arose with a cry and went to the room where his dead baby lay.

About two months after this Annie insisted that she must go home to Illinois. Jim protested in a way.

"You know, I'd like to send you," he said; "but I don't see where the money is to come from. And since I've got this nomination, I want to run as well as I can. My friends expect me to do my best for them. It's a duty, you know, and nothing less, for a few men, like me, to get in the legislature. We're going to get a railroad bill through this session that will straighten out a good many things. Be patient a little longer, Annie."

"I want to go home," was the only reply he got. "You must get the money, some way, for me to go home with."

"I have n't paid a cent of interest yet," he cried angrily. "I don't see what you mean by being so unreasonable!"

"You must get the money, some way," she reiterated.

He did not speak to her for a week, except when he was obliged to. But she did not seem to mind; and he gave her the money. He took her to the train in the little wagon that had met her when she first came. At the station, some women were gossiping excitedly, and Annie asked what they were saying.

"It's Mis' Dundy," they said. "She's been sent to th' insane asylum at Lincoln. She's gone stark mad. All she said on the way out was, 'Th' butter won't come! Th' butter won't come!'" Then they laughed a little — a strange laugh; and Annie thought of a drinking-song she had once heard, "Here's to the next who dies."

Ten days after this Jim got a letter from her. "I am never coming back, Jim," it said. "It is hopeless. I don't think I would mind standing still to be shot down if there was any good in it. But I'm not going back there to work harder than any slave for those money-loaners and the railroads. I guess they can all get along without me. And I am sure I can get along without them. I do not think this will make you feel very bad. You have n't seemed to notice me very much lately when I've been around, and I do not think you will notice very much when I am gone. I know what this means. I know I am breaking my word when I leave you. But remember, it is not you I leave, but the soil, Jim! I will not be its slave any longer. If you

care to come for me here, and live another life — but no, there would be no use. Our love, like our toil, has been eaten up by those rapacious acres. Let us say good-by."

Jim sat all night with this letter in his hand. Sometimes he dozed heavily in his chair. But he did not go to bed; and the next morning he hitched up his horses and rode to town. He went to the bank which held his notes.

"I 'll confess judgment as soon as you like," he said. "It 's all up with me."

It was done as quickly as the law would allow. And the things in the house were sold by auction. All the farmers were there with their wives. It made quite an outing for them. Jim moved around impassively, and chatted, now and then, with some of the men about what the horses ought to bring.

The auctioneer was a clever fellow. Between the putting up of the articles, he sang comic songs, and the funnier the song, the livelier the bidding that followed. The horses brought a decent price, and the ma-

chinery a disappointing one; and then, after a delicious snatch about Nell who rode the sway-backed mare at the county fair, he got down to the furniture, — the furniture which Jim had bought when he was expecting Annie.

Jim was walking around with his hands in his pockets, looking unconcerned, and, as the furniture began to go off, he came and sat down in the midst of it. Every one noticed his indifference. Some of them said that after all he could n't have been very ambitious. He did n't seem to take his failure much to heart. Every one was concentrating attention on the cooking-stove, when Jim leaned forward, quickly, over a little wicker work-stand.

There was a bit of unfinished sewing there, and it fell out as he lifted the cover. It was a baby's linen shirt. Jim let it lie, and then lifted from its receptacle a silver thimble. He put it in his vest-pocket.

The campaign came on shortly after this, and Jim Lancy was defeated. "I 'm going to Omaha," said he to the station-master, "and I 've got just enough to buy a ticket

with. There 's a kind of satisfaction in giving the last cent I have to the railroads."

Two months later, a "plain drunk" was registered at the station in Nebraska's metropolis. When they searched him they found nothing in his pockets but a silver thimble, and Joe Benson, the policeman who had brought in the "drunk," gave it to the matron, with his compliments. But she, when no one noticed, went softly to where the man was sleeping, and slipped it back into his pocket, with a sigh. For she knew somehow — as women do know things — that he had not stolen that thimble.

The Three Johns

The Three Johns

THE equinoctial line itself is not more imaginary than the line which divided the estates of the three Johns. The herds of the three Johns roamed at will, and nibbled the short grass far and near without let or hindrance; and the three Johns themselves were utterly indifferent as to boundary lines. Each of them had filed his application at the office of the government land-agent; each was engaged in the tedious task of "proving up;" and each owned one-third of the L-shaped cabin which stood at the point where the three ranches touched. The hundred and sixty acres which would have completed this quadrangle had not yet been "taken up."

The three Johns were not anxious to have a neighbor. Indeed, they had made up their minds that if one appeared on that

adjoining "hun'erd an' sixty," it would go hard with him. For they did not deal in justice very much — the three Johns. They considered it effete. It belonged in the East along with other outgrown superstitions. And they had given it out widely that it would be healthier for land applicants to give them elbow-room. It took a good many miles of sunburnt prairie to afford elbow-room for the three Johns.

They met by accident in Hamilton at the land-office. John Henderson, fresh from Cincinnati, manifestly unused to the ways of the country, looked at John Gillispie with a lurking smile. Gillispie wore a sombrero, fresh, white, and expansive. His boots had high heels, and were of elegant leather and finely arched at the instep. His corduroys disappeared in them half-way up the thigh. About his waist a sash of blue held a laced shirt of the same color in place. Henderson puffed at his cigarette, and continued to look a trifle quizzical.

Suddenly Gillispie walked up to him and said, in a voice of complete suavity, "Damn yeh, smoke a pipe!"

"Eh?" said Henderson, stupidly.

"Smoke a pipe," said the other. "That thing you have is bad for your complexion."

"I can take care of my complexion," said Henderson, firmly.

The two looked each other straight in the eye.

"You don't go on smoking that thing till you have apologized for that grin you had on your phiz a moment ago."

"I laugh when I please, and I smoke what I please," said Henderson, hotly, his face flaming as he realized that he was in for his first "row."

That was how it began. How it would have ended is not known — probably there would have been only one John — if it had not been for the almost miraculous appearance at this moment of the third John. For just then the two belligerents found themselves prostrate, their pistols only half-cocked, and between them stood a man all gnarled and squat, like one of those wind-torn oaks which grow on the arid heights. He was no older than the others, but the lines in his face were deep, and his large mouth twitched as he said: —

"Hold on here, yeh fools! There 's too much blood in you to spill. You 'll spile th' floor, and waste good stuff. We need blood out here!"

Gillispie bounced to his feet. Henderson arose suspiciously, keeping his eyes on his assailants.

"Oh, get up!" cried the intercessor. "We don't shoot men hereabouts till they git on their feet in fightin' trim."

"What do you know about what we do here?" interrupted Gillispie. "This is the first time I ever saw you around."

"That 's so," the other admitted. "I 'm just down from Montana. Came to take up a quarter section. Where I come from we give men a show, an' I thought perhaps yeh did th' same here."

"Why, yes," admitted Gillispie, "we do. But I don't want folks to laugh too much — not when I 'm around — unless they tell me what the joke is. I was just mentioning it to the gentleman," he added, dryly.

"So I saw," said the other; "you 're kind a emphatic in yer remarks. Yeh ought to give the gentleman a chance to git used to

the ways of th' country. He 'll be as tough as th' rest of us if you 'll give him a chance. I kin see it in him."

"Thank you," said Henderson. "I'm glad you do me justice. I wish you would n't let daylight through me till I 've had a chance to get my quarter section. I 'm going to be one of you, either as a live man or a corpse. But I prefer a hundred and sixty acres of land to six feet of it."

"There, now!" triumphantly cried the squat man. "Did n't I tell yeh? Give him a show! 'T ain't no fault of his that he 's a tenderfoot. He 'll get over that."

Gillispie shook hands with first one and then the other of the men. "It 's a square deal from this on," he said. "Come and have a drink."

That 's how they met — John Henderson, John Gillispie, and John Waite. And a week later they were putting up a shanty together for common use, which overlapped each of their reservations, and satisfied the law with its sociable subterfuge.

The life was n't bad, Henderson decided; and he adopted all the ways of the country

in an astonishingly short space of time. There was a freedom about it all which was certainly complete. The three alternated in the night watch. Once a week one of them went to town for provisions. They were not good at the making of bread, so they contented themselves with hot cakes. Then there was salt pork for a staple, and prunes. They slept in straw-lined bunks, with warm blankets for a covering. They made a point of bringing reading-matter back from town every week, and there were always cards to fall back on, and Waite sang songs for them with natural dramatic talent.

Nevertheless, in spite of their contentment, none of them was sorry when the opportunity offered for going to town. There was always a bit of stirring gossip to be picked up, and now and then there was a "show" at the "opera-house," in which, it is almost unnecessary to say, no opera had ever been sung. Then there was the hotel, at which one not only got good fare, but a chat with the three daughters of Jim O'Neal, the proprietor — girls with the accident of two Irish parents, who were, not-

withstanding, as typically American as they well could be. A half-hour's talk with these cheerful young women was all the more to be desired for the reason that within riding distance of the three Johns' ranch there were only two other women. One was Minerva Fitch, who had gone out from Michigan accompanied by an oil-stove and a knowledge of the English grammar, with the intention of teaching school, but who had been unable to carry these good intentions into execution for the reason that there were no children to teach, — at least, none but Bow-legged Joe. He was a sad little fellow, who looked like a prairie-dog, and who had very much the same sort of an outlook on life. The other woman was the brisk and efficient wife of Mr. Bill Deems, of "Missourah." Mr. Deems had never in his life done anything, not even so much as bring in a basket of buffalo chips to supply the scanty fire. That is to say, he had done nothing strictly utilitarian. Yet he filled his place. He was the most accomplished story-teller in the whole valley, and this accomplishment of his was held in as high esteem as the improvisa-

tions of a Welsh minstrel were among his reverencing people. His wife alone deprecated his skill, and interrupted his spirited narratives with sarcastic allusions concerning the empty cupboard, and the "state of her back," to which, as she confided to any who would listen, "there was not a rag fit to wear."

These two ladies had not, as may be surmised, any particular attraction for John Henderson. Truth to tell, Henderson had not come West with the intention of liking women, but rather with a determination to see and think as little of them as possible. Yet even the most confirmed misogynist must admit that it is a good thing to see a woman now and then, and for this reason Henderson found it amusing to converse with the amiable Misses O'Neal. At twenty-five one cannot be unyielding in one's avoidance of the sex.

Henderson, with his pony at a fine lope, was on his way to town one day, in that comfortable frame of mind adduced by an absence of any ideas whatever, when he suddenly became conscious of a shiver that seemed to run from his legs to the pony,

and back again. The animal gave a startled leap, and lifted his ears. There was a stirring in the coarse grasses; the sky, which a moment before had been like sapphire, dulled with an indescribable grayness.

Then came a little singing afar off, as if from a distant convocation of cicadæ, and before Henderson could guess what it meant, a cloud of dust was upon him, blinding and bewildering, pricking with sharp particles at eyes and nostrils. The pony was an ugly fellow, and when Henderson felt him put his forefeet together, he knew what that meant, and braced himself for the struggle. But it was useless; he had not yet acquired the knack of staying on the back of a bucking bronco, and the next moment he was on the ground, and around him whirled that saffron chaos of dust. The temperature lowered every moment. Henderson instinctively felt that this was but the beginning of the storm. He picked himself up without useless regrets for his pony, and made his way on.

The saffron hue turned to blackness, and then out of the murk shot a living green

ball of fire, and ploughed into the earth. Then sheets of water, that seemed to come simultaneously from earth and sky, swept the prairie, and in the midst of it struggled Henderson, weak as a little child, half bereft of sense by the strange numbness of head and dullness of eye. Another of those green balls fell and burst, as it actually appeared to him, before his horrified eyes, and the bellow and blare of the explosion made him cry out in a madness of fright and physical pain. In the illumination he had seen a cabin only a few feet in front of him, and toward it he made frantically, with an animal's instinctive desire for shelter.

The door did not yield at once to his pressure, and in the panic of his fear he threw his weight against it. There was a cry from within, a fall, and Henderson flung himself in the cabin and closed the door.

In the dusk of the storm he saw a woman half prostrate. It was she whom he had pushed from the door. He caught the hook in its staple, and turned to raise her. She was not trembling as much as he, but, like himself, she was dizzy with the shock of

the lightning. In the midst of all the clamor Henderson heard a shrill crying, and looking toward the side of the room, he dimly perceived three tiny forms crouched in one of the bunks. The woman took the smallest of the children in her arms, and kissed and soothed it; and Henderson, after he had thrown a blanket at the bottom of the door to keep out the drifting rain, sat with his back to it, bracing it against the wind, lest the frail staple should give way. He managed some way to reach out and lay hold of the other little ones, and got them in his arms, — a boy, so tiny he seemed hardly human, and a girl somewhat sturdier. They cuddled in his arms, and clutched his clothes with their frantic little hands, and the three sat so while the earth and the heavens seemed to be meeting in angry combat.

And back and forth, back and forth, in the dimness swayed the body of the woman, hushing her babe.

Almost as suddenly as the darkness had fallen, it lifted. The lightning ceased to threaten, and almost frolicked, — little way-

ward flashes of white and yellow dancing in mid-air. The wind wailed less frequently, like a child who sobs in its sleep. And at last Henderson could make his voice heard.

"Is there anything to build a fire with?" he shouted. "The children are shivering so."

The woman pointed to a basket of buffalo chips in the corner, and he wrapped his little companions up in a blanket while he made a fire in the cooking-stove. The baby was sleeping by this time, and the woman began tidying the cabin, and when the fire was burning brightly, she put some coffee on.

"I wish I had some clothes to offer you," she said, when the wind had subsided sufficiently to make talking possible. "I 'm afraid you 'll have to let them get dry on you."

"Oh, that 's of no consequence at all! We 're lucky to get off with our lives. I never saw anything so terrible. Fancy! half an hour ago it was summer; now it is winter!"

"It seems rather sudden when you 're not used to it," the woman admitted. "I 've

lived in the West six years now; you can't frighten me any more. We never die out here before our time comes."

"You seem to know that I haven't been here long," said Henderson, with some chagrin.

"Yes," admitted the woman; "you have the ear-marks of a man from the East."

She was a tall woman, with large blue eyes, and a remarkable quantity of yellow hair braided on top of her head. Her gown was of calico, of such a pattern as a widow might wear.

"I haven't been out of town a week yet," she said. "We're not half settled. Not having any one to help makes it harder; and the baby is rather fretful."

"But you're not alone with all these little codgers?" cried Henderson, in dismay.

The woman turned toward him with a sort of defiance. "Yes, I am," she said; "and I'm as strong as a horse, and I mean to get through all right. Here were the three children in my arms, you may say, and no way to get in a cent. I wasn't going to stand it just to please other folk. I said,

let them talk if they want to, but I 'm going to hold down a claim, and be accumulating something while the children are getting up a bit. Oh, I 'm not afraid! "

In spite of this bold assertion of bravery, there was a sort of break in her voice. She was putting dishes on the table as she talked, and turned some ham in the skillet, and got the children up before the fire, and dropped some eggs in water, — all with a rapidity that bewildered Henderson.

" How long have you been alone? " he asked, softly.

" Three months before baby was born, and he 's five months old now. I — I — you think I can get on here, don't you? There was nothing else to do."

She was folding another blanket over the sleeping baby now, and the action brought to her guest the recollection of a thousand tender moments of his dimly remembered youth.

" You 'll get on if we have anything to do with it," he cried, suppressing an oath with difficulty, just from pure emotion.

And he told her about the three Johns'

ranch, and found it was only three miles distant, and that both were on the same road; only her cabin, having been put up during the past week, had of course been unknown to him. So it ended in a sort of compact that they were to help each other in such ways as they could. Meanwhile the fire got genial, and the coffee filled the cabin with its comfortable scent, and all of them ate together quite merrily, Henderson cutting up the ham for the youngsters; and he told how he chanced to come out; and she entertained him with stories of what she thought at first when she was brought a bride to Hamilton, the adjacent village, and convulsed him with stories of the people, whom she saw with humorous eyes.

Henderson marvelled how she could in those few minutes have rescued the cabin from the desolation in which the storm had plunged it. Out of the window he could see the stricken grasses dripping cold moisture, and the sky still angrily plunging forward like a disturbed sea. Not a tree or a house broke the view. The desolation of it swept over him as it never had before. But

within the little ones were chattering to themselves in odd baby dialect, and the mother was laughing with them.

"Women are n't always useless," she said, at parting; "and you tell your chums that when they get hungry for a slice of home-made bread they can get it here. And the next time they go by, I want them to stop in and look at the children. It 'll do them good. They may think they won't enjoy themselves, but they will."

"Oh, I 'll answer for that!" cried he, shaking hands with her. "I 'll tell them we have just the right sort of a neighbor."

"Thank you," said she, heartily. "And you may tell them that her name is Catherine Ford."

Once at home, he told his story.

"H'm!" said Gillispie, "I guess I 'll have to go to town myself to-morrow."

Henderson looked at him blackly. "She 's a woman alone, Gillispie," said he, severely, "trying to make her way with handicaps —"

"Shet up, can't ye, ye darned fool?" roared Gillispie. "What do yeh take me fur?"

Waite was putting on his rubber coat preparatory to going out for his night with the cattle. "Guess you 're makin' a mistake, my boy," he said, gently. "There ain't no danger of any woman bein' treated rude in these parts."

"I know it, by Jove!" cried Henderson, in quick contriteness.

"All right," grunted Gillispie, in tacit acceptance of this apology. "I guess you thought you was in civilized parts."

Two days after this Waite came in late to his supper. "Well, I seen her," he announced.

"Oh! did you?" cried Henderson, knowing perfectly well whom he meant. "What was she doing?"

"Killin' snakes, b' gosh! She says th' baby 's crazy fur um, an' so she takes aroun' a hoe on her shoulder wherever she goes, an' when she sees a snake, she has it out with 'im then an' there. I says to 'er, 'Yer don't expec' t' git all th' snakes outen this here country, d' yeh?' 'Well,' she says, 'I 'm as good a man as St. Patrick any day.' She is a jolly one, Henderson. She tuk

me in an' showed me th' kids, and give me a loaf of gingerbread to bring home. Here it is; see?"

"Hu!" said Gillispie. "I 'm not in it." But for all of his scorn he was not above eating the gingerbread.

It was gardening time, and the three Johns were putting in every spare moment in the little paling made of willow twigs behind the house. It was little enough time they had, though, for the cattle were new to each other and to the country, and they were hard to manage. It was generally conceded that Waite had a genius for herding, and he could take the "mad" out of a fractious animal in a way that the others looked on as little less than superhuman. Thus it was that one day, when the clay had been well turned, and the seeds arranged on the kitchen table, and all things prepared for an afternoon of busy planting, that Waite and Henderson, who were needed out with the cattle, felt no little irritation at the inexplicable absence of Gillispie, who was to look after the garden. It was quite nightfall when he at last returned. Supper was

ready, although it had been Gillispie's turn to prepare it.

Henderson was sore from his saddle, and cross at having to do more than his share of the work. "Damn yeh!" he cried, as Gillispie appeared. "Where yeh been?"

"Making garden," responded Gillispie, slowly.

"Making garden!" Henderson indulged in some more harmless oaths.

Just then Gillispie drew from under his coat a large and friendly looking apple-pie. "Yes," he said, with emphasis; "I've bin a-makin' garden fur Mis' Ford."

And so it came about that the three Johns knew her and served her, and that she never had a need that they were not ready to supply if they could. Not one of them would have thought of going to town without stopping to inquire what was needed at the village. As for Catherine Ford, she was fighting her way with native pluck and maternal unselfishness. If she had feared solitude she did not suffer from it. The activity of her life stifled her fresh sorrow. She was pleasantly excited by the rumors

that a railroad was soon to be built near the place, which would raise the value of the claim she was "holding down" many thousand dollars.

It is marvellous how sorrow shrinks when one is very healthy and very much occupied. Although poverty was her close companion, Catherine had no thought of it in this primitive manner of living. She had come out there, with the independence and determination of a Western woman, for the purpose of living at the least possible expense, and making the most she could while the baby was "getting out of her arms." That process has its pleasures, which every mother feels in spite of burdens, and the mind is happily dulled by nature's merciful provision. With a little child tugging at the breast, care and fret vanish, not because of the happiness so much as because of a certain mammal complacency, which is not at all intellectual, but serves its purpose better than the profoundest method of reasoning.

So without any very unbearable misery at her recent widowhood, this healthy young woman worked in field and house, cared for

her little ones, milked the two cows out in the corral, sewed, sang, rode, baked, and was happy for very wholesomeness. Sometimes she reproached herself that she was not more miserable, remembering that long grave back in the unkempt little prairie cemetery, and she sat down to coax her sorrow into proper prominence. But the baby cooing at her from its bunk, the low of the cattle from the corral begging her to relieve their heavy bags, the familiar call of one of her neighbors from without, even the burning sky of the summer dawns, broke the spell of this conjured sorrow, and in spite of herself she was again a very hearty and happy young woman. Besides, if one has a liking for comedy, it is impossible to be dull on a Nebraska prairie. The people are a merrier divertisement than the theatre with its hackneyed stories. Catherine Ford laughed a good deal, and she took the three Johns into her confidence, and they laughed with her. There was Minerva Fitch, who insisted on coming over to tell Catherine how to raise her children, and who was almost offended that the children would n't

die of sunstroke when she predicted. And there was Bob Ackerman, who had inflammatory rheumatism and a Past, and who confided the latter to Mrs. Ford while she doctored the former with homœopathic medicines. And there were all the strange visionaries who came out prospecting, and quite naturally drifted to Mrs. Ford's cabin for a meal, and paid her in compliments of a peculiarly Western type. And there were the three Johns themselves. Catherine considered it no treason to laugh at them a little.

Yet at Waite she did not laugh much. There had come to be something pathetic in the constant service he rendered her. The beginning of his more particular devotion had started in a particular way. Malaria was very bad in the country. It had carried off some of the most vigorous on the prairie, and twice that summer Catherine herself had laid out the cold forms of her neighbors on ironing-boards, and, with the assistance of Bill Deems of Missourah, had read the burial service over them. She had averted several other fatal runs of fever by the con-

tents of her little medicine-case. These remedies she dealt out with an intelligence that astonished her patients, until it was learned that she was studying medicine at the time that she met her late husband, and was persuaded to assume the responsibilities of matrimony instead of those of the medical profession.

One day in midsummer, when the sun was focussing itself on the raw pine boards of her shanty, and Catherine had the shades drawn for coolness and the water-pitcher swathed in wet rags, East Indian fashion, she heard the familiar halloo of Waite down the road. This greeting, which was usually sent to her from the point where the dipping road lifted itself into the first view of the house, did not contain its usual note of cheerfulness. Catherine, wiping her hands on her checked apron, ran out to wave a welcome; and Waite, his squat body looking more distorted than ever, his huge shoulders lurching as he walked, came fairly plunging down the hill.

"It's all up with Henderson!" he cried, as Catherine approached. "He's got the malery, an' he says he's dyin'."

"That's no sign he's dying, because he says so," retorted Catherine.

"He wants to see yeh," panted Waite, mopping his big ugly head. "I think he's got somethin' particular to say."

"How long has he been down?"

"Three days; an' yeh would n't know 'im."

The children were playing on the floor at that side of the house where it was least hot. Catherine poured out three bowls of milk, and cut some bread, meanwhile telling Kitty how to feed the baby.

"She's a sensible thing, is the little daughter," said Catherine, as she tied on her sunbonnet and packed a little basket with things from the cupboard. She kissed the babies tenderly, flung her hoe — her only weapon of defence — over her shoulder, and the two started off.

They did not speak, for their throats were soon too parched. The prairie was burned brown with the sun; the grasses curled as if they had been on a gridiron. A strong wind was blowing; but it brought no comfort, for it was heavy with a scorching heat.

The skin smarted and blistered under it, and the eyes felt as if they were filled with sand. The sun seemed to swing but a little way above the earth, and though the sky was intensest blue, around about this burning ball there was a halo of copper, as if the very ether were being consumed in yellow fire.

Waite put some big burdock-leaves on Catherine's head under her bonnet, and now and then he took a bottle of water from his pocket and made her swallow a mouthful. She staggered often as she walked, and the road was black before her. Still, it was not very long before the oddly shaped shack of the three Johns came in sight; and as he caught a glimpse of it, Waite quickened his footsteps.

"What if he should be gone?" he said, under his breath.

"Oh, come off!" said Catherine, angrily. "He's not gone. You make me tired!"

But she was trembling when she stopped just before the door to compose herself for a moment. Indeed, she trembled so very much that Waite put out his sprawling hand

to steady her. She gently felt the pressure tightening, and Waite whispered in her ear:

"I guess I 'd stand by him as well as anybody, excep' you, Mis' Ford. He 's been my bes' friend. But I guess you like him better, eh?"

Catherine raised her finger. She could hear Henderson's voice within; it was pitiably querulous. He was half sitting up in his bunk, and Gillispie had just handed him a plate on which two cakes were swimming in black molasses and pork gravy. Henderson looked at it a moment; then over his face came a look of utter despair. He dropped his head in his arms and broke into uncontrolled crying.

"Oh, my God, Gillispie," he sobbed, "I shall die out here in this wretched hole! I want my mother. Great God, Gillispie, am I going to die without ever seeing my mother?"

Gillispie, maddened at this anguish, which he could in no way alleviate, sought comfort by first lighting his pipe and then taking his revolver out of his hip-pocket and playing with it. Henderson continued to shake with

sobs, and Catherine, who had never before in her life heard a man cry, leaned against the door for a moment to gather courage. Then she ran into the house quickly, laughing as she came. She took Henderson's arms away from his face and laid him back on the pillow, and she stooped over him and kissed his forehead in the most matter-of-fact way.

"That 's what your mother would do if she were here," she cried, merrily. "Where 's the water?"

She washed his face and hands a long time, till they were cool and his convulsive sobs had ceased. Then she took a slice of thin bread from her basket and a spoonful of amber jelly. She beat an egg into some milk and dropped a little liquor within it, and served them together on the first clean napkin that had been in the cabin of the three Johns since it was built.

At this the great fool on the bed cried again, only quietly, tears of weak happiness running from his feverish eyes. And Catherine straightened the disorderly cabin. She came every day for two weeks, and by

that time Henderson, very uncertain as to the strength of his legs, but once more accoutred in his native pluck, sat up in a chair, for which she had made clean soft cushions, writing a letter to his mother. The floor was scrubbed; the cabin had taken to itself cupboards made of packing-boxes; it had clothes-presses and shelves; curtains at the windows; boxes for all sort of necessaries, from flour to tobacco; and a cook-book on the wall, with an inscription within which was more appropriate than respectful.

The day that she announced that she would have no further call to come back, Waite, who was looking after the house while Gillispie was afield, made a little speech.

"After this here," he said, "we four stands er falls together. Now look here, there 's lots of things can happen to a person on this cussed praira, and no one be none th' wiser. So see here, Mis' Ford, every night one of us is a-goin' to th' roof of this shack. From there we can see your place. If anything is th' matter — it don't signify how little er how big — you hang a lantern

on th' stick that I 'll put alongside th' house to-morrow. Yeh can h'ist th' light up with a string, and every mornin' before we go out we 'll look too, and a white rag 'll bring us quick as we can git there. We don't say nothin' about what we owe yeh, fur that ain't our way, but we sticks to each other from this on."

Catherine's eyes were moist. She looked at Henderson. His face had no expression in it at all. He did not even say good-by to her, and she turned, with the tears suddenly dried under her lids, and walked down the road in the twilight.

Weeks went by, and though Gillispie and Waite were often at Catherine's, Henderson never came. Gillispie gave it out as his opinion that Henderson was an ungrateful puppy; but Waite said nothing. This strange man, who seemed like a mere untoward accident of nature, had changed during the summer. His big ill-shaped body had grown more gaunt; his deep-set gray eyes had sunk deeper; the gentleness which had distinguished him even on the wild ranges of Montana became more marked.

Late in August he volunteered to take on himself the entire charge of the night watch.

"It's nicer to be out at night," he said to Catherine. "Then you don't keep looking off at things; you can look inside;" and he struck his breast with his splay hand.

Cattle are timorous under the stars. The vastness of the plains, the sweep of the wind under the unbroken arch, frighten them; they are made for the close comforts of the barn-yard; and the apprehension is contagious, as every ranchman knows. Waite realized the need of becoming good friends with his animals. Night after night, riding up and down in the twilight of the stars, or dozing, rolled in his blanket, in the shelter of a knoll, he would hear a low roar; it was the cry of the alarmist. Then from every direction the cattle would rise with trembling awkwardness on their knees, and answer, giving out sullen bellowings. Some of them would begin to move from place to place, spreading the baseless alarm, and then came the time for action, else over the plain in mere fruitless frenzy would go the

whole frantic band, lashed to madness by their own fears, trampling each other, heedless of any obstacle, in pitiable, deadly rout. Waite knew the premonitory signs well, and at the first warning bellow he was on his feet, alert and determined, his energy nerved for a struggle in which he always conquered.

Waite had a secret which he told to none, knowing, in his unanalytical fashion, that it would not be believed in. But soon as ever the dark heads of the cattle began to lift themselves, he sent a resonant voice out into the stillness. The songs he sang were hymns, and he made them into a sort of imperative lullaby. Waite let his lungs and soul fill with the breath of the night; he gave himself up to the exaltation of mastering those trembling brutes. Mounting, melodious, with even and powerful swing he let his full notes fall on the air in the confidence of power, and one by one the reassured cattle would lie down again, lowing in soft contentment, and so fall asleep with noses stretched out in mute attention, till their presence could hardly

be guessed except for the sweet aroma of their cuds.

One night in the early dusk, he saw Catherine Ford hastening across the prairie with Bill Deems. He sent a halloo out to them, which they both answered as they ran on. Waite knew on what errand of mercy Catherine was bent, and he thought of the children over at the cabin alone. The cattle were quiet, the night beautiful, and he concluded that it was safe enough, since he was on his pony, to ride down there about midnight and see that the little ones were safe.

The dark sky, pricked with points of intensest light, hung over him so beneficently that in his heart there leaped a joy which even his ever-present sorrow could not disturb. This sorrow Waite openly admitted not only to himself, but to others. He had said to Catherine: "You see, I 'll always hev to love yeh. An' yeh 'll not git cross with me; I 'm not goin' to be in th' way." And Catherine had told him, with tears in her eyes, that his love could never be but a comfort to any woman. And these words, which the poor fellow had in no sense mistaken,

comforted him always, became part of his joy as he rode there, under those piercing stars, to look after her little ones. He found them sleeping in their bunks, the baby tight in Kitty's arms, the little boy above them in the upper bunk, with his hand in the long hair of his brown spaniel. Waite softly kissed each of them, so Kitty, who was half waking, told her mother afterwards, and then, bethinking him that Catherine might not be able to return in time for their breakfast, found the milk and bread, and set it for them on the table. Catherine had been writing, and her unfinished letter lay open beside the ink. He took up the pen and wrote,

"The childdren was all asleep at twelv.
"J. W."

He had not more than got on his pony again before he heard an ominous sound that made his heart leap. It was a frantic dull pounding of hoofs. He knew in a second what it meant. There was a stampede among the cattle. If the animals had

all been his, he would not have lost his sense of judgment. But the realization that he had voluntarily undertaken the care of them, and that the larger part of them belonged to his friends, put him in a passion of apprehension that, as a ranchman, was almost inexplicable. He did the very thing of all others that no cattle-man in his right senses would think of doing. Gillispie and Henderson, talking it over afterward, were never able to understand it. It is possible — just barely possible — that Waite, still drunk on his solitary dreams, knew what he was doing, and chose to bring his little chapter to an end while the lines were pleasant. At any rate, he rode straight forward, shouting and waving his arms in an insane endeavor to head off that frantic mob. The noise woke the children, and they peered from the window as the pawing and bellowing herd plunged by, trampling the young steers under their feet.

In the early morning, Catherine Ford, spent both in mind and body, came walking slowly home. In her heart was a prayer of thanksgiving. Mary Deems lay sleeping back in

her comfortless shack, with her little son by her side.

"The wonder of God is in it," said Catherine to herself as she walked home. "All the ministers of all the world could not have preached me such a sermon as I've had to-night."

So dim had been the light and so perturbed her mind that she had not noticed how torn and trampled was the road. But suddenly a bulk in her pathway startled her. It was the dead and mangled body of a steer. She stooped over it to read the brand on its flank. "It's one of the three Johns'," she cried out, looking anxiously about her. "How could that have happened?"

The direction which the cattle had taken was toward her house, and she hastened homeward. And not a quarter of a mile from her door she found the body of Waite beside that of his pony, crushed out of its familiar form into something unspeakably shapeless. In her excitement she half dragged, half carried that mutilated body home, and then ran up her signal of alarm on the stick that Waite himself had erected

for her convenience. She thought it would be a long time before any one reached her, but she had hardly had time to bathe the disfigured face and straighten the disfigured body before Henderson was pounding at her door. Outside stood his pony panting from its terrific exertions. Henderson had not seen her before for six weeks. Now he stared at her with frightened eyes.

"What is it? What is it?" he cried. "What has happened to you, my — my love?"

At least afterward, thinking it over as she worked by day or tossed in her narrow bunk at night, it seemed to Catherine that those were the words he spoke. Yet she could never feel sure; nothing in his manner after that justified the impassioned anxiety of his manner in those first few uncertain moments; for a second later he saw the body of his friend and learned the little that Catherine knew. They buried him the next day in a little hollow where there was a spring and some wild aspens.

"He never liked the prairie," Catherine said, when she selected the spot. "And I want him to lie as sheltered as possible."

After he had been laid at rest, and she was back, busy with tidying her neglected shack, she fell to crying so that the children were scared.

"There's no one left to care what becomes of us," she told them, bitterly. "We might starve out here for all that any one cares."

And all through the night her tears fell, and she told herself that they were all for the man whose last thought was for her and her babies; she told herself over and over again that her tears were all for him. After this the autumn began to hurry on, and the snow fell capriciously, days of biting cold giving place to retrospective glances at summer. The last of the vegetables were taken out of the garden and buried in the cellar; and a few tons of coal — dear almost as diamonds — were brought out to provide against the severest weather. Ordinarily buffalo chips were the fuel. Catherine was alarmed at the way her wretched little store of money began to vanish. The baby was fretful with its teething, and was really more care than when she nursed it. The days shortened, and it seemed to her that she was forever

working by lamp-light. The prairies were brown and forbidding, the sky often a mere gray pall. The monotony of the life began to seem terrible. Sometimes her ears ached for a sound. For a time in the summer so many had seemed to need her that she had been happy in spite of her poverty and her loneliness. Now, suddenly, no one wanted her. She could find no source of inspiration. She wondered how she was going to live through the winter, and keep her patience and her good-nature.

"You 'll love me," she said, almost fiercely, one night to the children — "you 'll love mamma, no matter how cross and homely she gets, won't you?"

The cold grew day by day. A strong winter was setting in. Catherine took up her study of medicine again, and sat over her books till midnight. It occurred to her that she might fit herself for nursing by spring, and that the children could be put with some one — she did not dare to think with whom. But this was the only solution she could find to her problem of existence.

November settled down drearily. Few

passed the shack. Catherine. who had no one to speak with excepting the children, continually devised amusements for them. They got to living in a world of fantasy, and were never themselves, but always wild Indians, or arctic explorers, or Robinson Crusoes. Kitty and Roderick, young as they were, found a never-ending source of amusement in these little grotesque dreams and dramas. The fund of money was getting so low that Catherine was obliged to economize even in the necessities. If it had not been for her two cows, she would hardly have known how to find food for her little ones. But she had a wonderful way of making things with eggs and milk, and she kept her little table always inviting. The day before Thanksgiving she determined that they should all have a frolic.

"By Christmas," she said to Kitty, "the snow may be so bad that I cannot get to town. We'll have our high old time now."

There is no denying that Catherine used slang even in talking to the children. The little pony had been sold long ago, and

going to town meant a walk of twelve miles. But Catherine started out early in the morning, and was back by nightfall, not so very much the worse, and carrying in her arms bundles which might have fatigued a bronco.

The next morning she was up early, and was as happy and ridiculously excited over the prospect of the day's merrymaking as if she had been Kitty. Busy as she was, she noticed a peculiar oppression in the air, which intensified as the day went on. The sky seemed to hang but a little way above the rolling stretch of frost-bitten grass. But Kitty laughing over her new doll, Roderick startling the sullen silence with his drum, the smell of the chicken, slaughtered to make a prairie holiday, browning in the oven, drove all apprehensions from Catherine's mind. She was a common creature. Such very little things could make her happy. She sang as she worked; and what with the drumming of her boy, and the little exulting shrieks of her baby, the shack was filled with a deafening and exhilarating din.

It was a little past noon, when she became

conscious that there was sweeping down on her a gray sheet of snow and ice, and not till then did she realize what those lowering clouds had signified. For one moment she stood half paralyzed. She thought of everything, — of the cattle, of the chance for being buried in this drift, of the stock of provisions, of the power of endurance of the children. While she was still thinking, the first ice-needles of the blizzard came peppering the windows. The cattle ran bellowing to the lee side of the house and crouched there, and the chickens scurried for the coop. Catherine seized such blankets and bits of carpet as she could find, and crammed them at windows and doors. Then she piled coal on the fire, and clothed the children in all they had that was warmest, their out-door garments included; and with them close about her, she sat and waited. The wind seemed to push steadily at the walls of the house. The howling became horrible. She could see that the children were crying with fright, but she could not hear them. The air was dusky; the cold, in spite of the fire, intolerable. In every crevice of the wretched

structure the ice and snow made their way. It came through the roof, and began piling up in little pointed strips under the crevices. Catherine put the children all together in one bunk, covered them with all the bedclothes she had, and then stood before them defiantly, facing the west, from whence the wind was driving. Not suddenly, but by steady pressure, at length the window-sash yielded, and the next moment that whirlwind was in the house, — a maddening tumult of ice and wind, leaving no room for resistance; a killing cold, against which it was futile to fight. Catherine threw the bedclothes over the heads of the children, and then threw herself across the bunk, gasping and choking for breath. Her body would not have yielded to the suffering yet, so strongly made and sustained was it; but her dismay stifled her. She saw in one horrified moment the frozen forms of her babies, now so pink and pleasant to the sense; and oblivion came to save her from further misery.

She was alive — just barely alive — when Gillispie and Henderson got there, three hours later, the very balls of their eyes

almost frozen into blindness. But for an instinct stronger than reason they would never have been able to have found their way across that trackless stretch. The children lying unconscious under their coverings were neither dead nor actually frozen, although the men putting their hands on their little hearts could not at first discover the beating. Stiff and suffering as these young fellows were, it was no easy matter to get the window back into place and re-light the fire. They had tied flasks of liquor about their waists; and this beneficent fluid they used with that sense of appreciation which only a pioneer can feel toward whiskey. It was hours before Catherine rewarded them with a gleam of consciousness. Her body had been frozen in many places. Her arms, outstretched over her children and holding the clothes down about them, were rigid. But consciousness came at length, dimly struggling up through her brain; and over her she saw her friends rubbing and rubbing those strong firm arms of hers with snow.

She half raised her head, with a horror of comprehension in her eyes, and listened. A

cry answered her, — a cry of dull pain from the baby. Henderson dropped on his knees beside her.

"They are all safe," he said. "And we will never leave you again. I have been afraid to tell you how I love you. I thought I might offend you. I thought I ought to wait — you know why. But I will never let you run the risks of this awful life alone again. You must rename the baby. From this day his name is John. And we will have the three Johns again back at the old ranch. It does n't matter whether you love me or not, Catherine, I am going to take care of you just the same. Gillispie agrees with me."

"Damme, yes," muttered Gillispie, feeling of his hip-pocket for consolation in his old manner.

Catherine struggled to find her voice, but it would not come.

"Do not speak," whispered John. "Tell me with your eyes whether you will come as my wife or only as our sister."

Catherine told him.

"This is Thanksgiving day," said he.

"And we don't know much about praying, but I guess we all have something in our hearts that does just as well."

"Damme, yes," said Gillispie, again, as he pensively cocked and uncocked his revolver.

A Resuscitation

A Resuscitation

AFTER being dead twenty years, he walked out into the sunshine.

It was as if the bones of a bleached skeleton should join themselves on some forgotten plain, and look about them for the vanished flesh.

To be dead it is not necessary to be in the grave. There are places where the worms creep about the heart instead of the body.

The penitentiary is one of these.

David Culross had been in the penitentiary twenty years. Now, with that worm-eaten heart, he came out into liberty and looked about him for the habiliments with which he had formerly clothed himself, — for hope, self-respect, courage, pugnacity, and industry.

But they had vanished and left no trace, like the flesh of the dead men on the plains,

and so, morally unapparelled, in the hideous skeleton of his manhood, he walked on down the street under the mid-June sunshine.

You can understand, can you not, how a skeleton might wish to get back into its comfortable grave? David Culross had not walked two blocks before he was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to beg to be shielded once more in that safe and shameful retreat from which he had just been released. A horrible perception of the largeness of the world swept over him. Space and eternity could seem no larger to the usual man than earth — that snug and insignificant planet — looked to David Culross.

"If I go back," he cried, despairingly, looking up to the great building that arose above the stony hills, "they will not take me in." He was absolutely without a refuge, utterly without a destination; he did not have a hope. There was nothing he desired except the surrounding of those four narrow walls between which he had lain at night and dreamed those ever-recurring dreams, — dreams which were never prophecies or

promises, but always the hackneyed history of what he had sacrificed by his crime, and relinquished by his pride.

The men who passed him looked at him with mingled amusement and pity. They knew the "prison look," and they knew the prison clothes. For though the State gives to its discharged convicts clothes which are like those of other men, it makes a hundred suits from the same sort of cloth. The police know the fabric, and even the citizens recognize it. But, then, were each man dressed in different garb he could not be disguised. Every one knows in what dull school that sidelong glance is learned, that aimless drooping of the shoulders, that rhythmic lifting of the heavy foot.

David Culross wondered if his will were dead. He put it to the test. He lifted up his head to a position which it had not held for many miserable years. He put his hands in his pockets in a pitiful attempt at nonchalance, and walked down the street with a step which was meant to be brisk, but which was in fact only uncertain. In his pocket were ten dollars. This much the

State equips a man with when it sends him out of its penal halls. It gives him also transportation to any point within reasonable distance that he may desire to reach. Culross had requested a ticket to Chicago. He naturally said Chicago. In the long colorless days it had been in Chicago that all those endlessly repeated scenes had been laid. Walking up the street now with that wavering ineffectual gait, these scenes came back to surge in his brain like waters ceaselessly tossed in a wind-swept basin.

There was the office, bare and clean, where the young stoop-shouldered clerks sat writing. In their faces was a strange resemblance, just as there was in the backs of the ledgers, and in the endless bills on the spindles. If one of them laughed, it was not with gayety, but with gratification at the discomfiture of another. None of them ate well. None of them were rested after sleep. All of them rode on the stuffy one-horse cars to and from their work. Sundays they lay in bed very late, and ate more dinner than they could digest. There was a certain fellowship among them, — such fel-

lowship as a band of captives among cannibals might feel, each of them waiting with vital curiosity to see who was the next to be eaten. But of that fellowship that plans in unison, suffers in sympathy, enjoys vicariously, strengthens into friendship and communion of soul they knew nothing. Indeed, such *camaraderie* would have been disapproved of by the Head Clerk. He would have looked on an emotion with exactly the same displeasure that he would on an error in the footing of the year's accounts. It was tacitly understood that one reached the proud position of Head Clerk by having no emotions whatever.

Culross did not remember having been born with a pen in his hand, or even with one behind his ear; but certainly from the day he had been let out of knickerbockers his constant companion had been that greatly overestimated article. His father dying at a time that cut short David's school-days, he went out armed with his new knowledge of double-entry, determined to make a fortune and a commercial name. Meantime, he lived in a suite of three rooms on West Madison Street

with his mother, who was a good woman, and lived where she did that she might be near her favorite meeting-house. She prayed, and cooked bad dinners, principally composed of dispiriting pastry. Her idea of house-keeping was to keep the shades down, whatever happened; and when David left home in the evening for any purpose of pleasure, she wept. David persuaded himself that he despised amusement, and went to bed each night at half-past nine in a folding bedstead in the front room, and, by becoming absolutely stolid from mere vegetation, imagined that he was almost fit to be a Head Clerk.

Walking down the street now after the twenty years, thinking of these dead but innocent days, this was the picture he saw; and as he reflected upon it, even the despoiled and desolate years just passed seemed richer by contrast.

He reached the station thus dreaming, and found, as he had been told when the warden bade him good-by, that a train was to be at hand directly bound to the city. A few moments later he was on that train. Well

back in the shadow, and out of sight of the other passengers, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the comfortable cushion. He would willingly have looked from the window, — green fields were new and wonderful; drifting clouds a marvel; men, houses, horses, farms, all a revelation, — but those haunting visions were at him again, and would not leave brain or eye free for other things.

But the next scene had warmer tints. It was the interior of a rich room, — crimson and amber fabrics, flowers, the gleam of a statue beyond the drapings; the sound of a tender piano unflinging a familiar melody, and a woman. She was just a part of all the luxury.

He himself, very timid and conscious of his awkwardness, sat near, trying barrenly to get some of his thoughts out of his brain on to his tongue.

"Strange, is n't it," the woman broke in on her own music, "that we have seen each other so very often and never spoken? I 've often thought introductions were ridiculous. Fancy seeing a person year in and year out, and really knowing all about him, and

being perfectly acquainted with his name — at least his or her name, you know — and then never speaking! Some one comes along, and says, 'Miss Le Baron, this is Mr. Culross,' just as if one did n't know that all the time! And there you are! You cease to be dumb folks, and fall to talking, and say a lot of things neither of you care about, and after five or six weeks of time and sundry meetings, get down to honestly saying what you mean. I 'm so glad we 've got through with that first stage, and can say what we think and tell what we really like."

Then the playing began again, — a harp-like intermingling of soft sounds. Zoe Le Baron's hands were very girlish. Everything about her was unformed. Even her mind was so. But all promised a full completion. The voice, the shoulders, the smile, the words, the lips, the arms, the whole mind and body, were rounding to maturity.

"Why do you never come to church in the morning?" asks Miss Le Baron, wheeling around on her piano-stool suddenly. "You are only there at night, with your mother."

"I go only on her account," replies David, truthfully. "In the morning I am so tired with the week's work that I rest at home. I ought to go, I know."

"Yes, you ought," returns the young woman, gravely. "It does n't really rest one to lie in bed like that. I've tried it at boarding-school. It was no good whatever."

"Should you advise me," asks David, in a confiding tone, "to arise early on Sunday?"

The girl blushes a little. "By all means!" she cries, her eyes twinkling, "and — and come to church. Our morning sermons are really very much better than those in the evening." And she plays a waltz, and what with the music and the warmth of the room and the perfume of the roses, a something nameless and mystical steals over the poor clerk, and swathes him about like the fumes of opium. They are alone. The silence is made deeper by that rhythmic unswelling of sound. As the painter flushes the bare wall into splendor, these emotions illuminated his soul, and gave to it that high courage that comes when men or women suddenly

realize that each life has its significance, — their own lives no less than the lives of others.

The man sitting there in the shadow in that noisy train saw in his vision how the lad arose and moved, like one under a spell, toward the piano. He felt again the enchantment of the music-ridden quiet, of the perfume, and the presence of the woman.

"Knowing you and speaking with you have not made much difference with me," he whispers, drunk on the new wine of passion, "for I have loved you since I saw you first. And though it is so sweet to hear you speak, your voice is no more beautiful than I thought it would be. I have loved you a long time, and I want to know — "

The broken man in the shadow remembered how the lad stopped, astonished at his boldness and his fluency, overcome suddenly at the thought of what he was saying. The music stopped with a discord. The girl arose, trembling and scarlet.

"I would not have believed it of you," she cries, "to take advantage of me like this, when I am alone — and — everything.

You know very well that nothing but trouble could come to either of us from your telling me a thing like that."

He puts his hands up to his face to keep off her anger. He is trembling with confusion.

Then she broke in penitently, trying to pull his hands away from his hot face: "Never mind! I know you did n't mean anything. Be good, do, and don't spoil the lovely times we have together. You know very well father and mother would n't let us see each other at all if they — if they thought you were saying anything such as you said just now."

"Oh, but I can't help it!" cries the boy, despairingly. "I have never loved anybody at all till now. I don't mean not another girl, you know. But you are the first being I ever cared for. I sometimes think mother cares for me because I pay the rent. And the office — you can't imagine what that is like. The men in it are moving corpses. They 're proud to be that way, and so was I till I knew you and learned what life was like. All the happy moments I have had have

been here. Now, if you tell me that we are not to care for each other — "

There was some one coming down the hall. The curtain lifted. A middle-aged man stood there looking at him.

" Culross," said he, " I 'm disappointed in you. I did n't mean to listen, but I could n't help hearing what you said just now. I don't blame you particularly. Young men will be fools. And I do not in any way mean to insult you when I tell you to stop your coming here. I don't want to see you inside this door again, and after a while you will thank me for it. You have taken a very unfair advantage of my invitation. I make allowances for your youth."

He held back the curtain for the lad to pass out. David threw a miserable glance at the girl. She was standing looking at her father with an expression that David could not fathom. He went into the hall, picked up his hat, and walked out in silence.

David wondered that night, walking the chilly streets after he quitted the house, and often, often afterward, if that comfortable

and prosperous gentleman, safe beyond the perturbations of youth, had any idea of what he had done. How *could* he know anything of the black monotony of the life of the man he turned from his door? The "desk's dead wood" and all its hateful slavery, the dull darkened rooms where his mother prosed through endless evenings, the bookless, joyless, hopeless existence that had cramped him all his days rose up before him, as a stretch of unbroken plain may rise before a lost man till it maddens him.

The bowed man in the car-seat remembered with a flush of reminiscent misery how the lad turned suddenly in his walk and entered the door of a drinking-room that stood open. It was very comfortable within. The screens kept out the chill of the autumn night, the sawdust-sprinkled floor was clean, the tables placed near together, the bar glittering, the attendants white-aproned and brisk.

David liked the place, and he liked better still the laughter that came from a room within. It had a note in it a little different

from anything he had ever heard before in his life, and one that echoed his mood. He ventured to ask if he might go into the farther room.

It does not mean much when most young men go to a place like this. They take their bit of unwholesome dissipation quietly enough, and are a little coarser and more careless each time they indulge in it, perhaps. But certainly their acts, whatever gradual deterioration they may indicate, bespeak no sudden moral revolution. With this young clerk it was different. He was a worse man from the moment he entered the door, for he did violence to his principles; he killed his self-respect.

He had been paid at the office that night, and he had the money — a week's miserable pittance — in his pocket. His every action revealed the fact that he was a novice in recklessness. His innocent face piqued the men within. They gave him a welcome that amazed him. Of course the rest of the evening was a chaos to him. The throat down which he poured the liquor was as tender as a child's. The men turned his

head with their ironical compliments. Their boisterous good-fellowship was as intoxicating to this poor young recluse as the liquor.

It was the revulsion from this feeling, when he came to a consciousness that the men were laughing at him and not with him, that wrecked his life. He had gone from beer to whiskey, and from whiskey to brandy, by this time, at the suggestion of the men, and was making awkward lunges with a billiard cue, spurred on by the mocking applause of the others. One young fellow was particularly hilarious at his expense. His jokes became insults, or so they seemed to David.

A quarrel followed, half a jest on the part of the other, all serious as far as David was concerned. And then — Well, who could tell how it happened? The billiard cue was in David's hand, and the skull of the jester was split, a horrible gaping thing, revoltingly animal.

David never saw his home again. His mother gave it out in church that her heart was broken, and she wrote a letter to David begging him to reform. She said she

would never cease to pray for him, that he might return to grace. He had an attorney, an impecunious and very aged gentleman, whose life was a venerable failure, and who talked so much about his personal inconveniences from indigestion that he forgot to take a very keen interest in the concerns of his client. David's trial made no sensation. He did not even have the cheap sympathy of the morbid. The court-room was almost empty the dull spring day when the east wind beat against the window, jangling the loose panes all through the reading of the verdict.

Twenty years!

Twenty years in the penitentiary!

David looked up at the judge and smiled. Men have been known to smile that way when the car-wheel crashes over their legs, or a bullet lets the air through their lungs.

All that followed would have seemed more terrible if it had not appeared to be so remote. David had to assure himself over and over that it was really he who was put in that disgraceful dress, and locked in that shameful walk from corridor to work-

room, from work-room to chapel. The work was not much more monotonous than that to which he had been accustomed in the office. Here, as there, one was reproved for not doing the required amount, but never praised for extraordinary efforts. Here, as there, the workers regarded each other with dislike and suspicion. Here, as there, work was a penalty and not a pleasure.

It is the nights that are to be dreaded in a penitentiary. Speech eases the brain of free men; but the man condemned to eternal silence is bound to endure torments. Thought, which might be a diversion, becomes a curse; it is a painful disease which becomes chronic. It does not take long to forget the days of the week and the months of the year when time brings no variance. David drugged himself on dreams. He knew it was weakness, but it was the wine of forgetfulness, and he indulged in it. He went over and over, in endless repetition, every scene in which Zoe Le Baron had figured.

He learned by a paper that she had gone to Europe. He was glad of that. For there

were hours in which he imagined that his fate might have caused her distress — not much, of course, but perhaps an occasional hour of sympathetic regret. But it was pleasanter not to think of that. He preferred to remember the hours they had spent together while she was teaching him the joy of life.

How lovely her gray eyes were! Deep, yet bright, and full of silent little speeches. The rooms in which he imagined her as moving were always splendid; the gowns she wore were of rustling silk. He never in any dream, waking or sleeping, associated her with poverty or sorrow or pain. Gay and beautiful, she moved from city to city, in these visions of David's, looking always at wonderful things, and finding laughter in every happening.

It was six months after his entrance into his silent abode that a letter came for him.

"By rights, Culross," said the warden, "I should not give this letter to you. It is n't the sort we approve of. But you 're in for a good spell, and if there is anything that can make life seem more tolerable, I don't

know but you're entitled to it. At least, I'm not the man to deny it to you."

This was the letter: —

"My Dear Friend, — I hope you do not think that all these months, when you have been suffering so terribly, I have been thinking of other things! But I am sure you know the truth. You know that I could not send you word or come to see you, or I would have done it. When I first heard of what you had done, I saw it all as it happened, — that dreadful scene, I mean, in the saloon. I am sure I have imagined everything just as it was. I begged papa to help you, but he was very angry. You see, papa was so peculiar. He thought more of the appearances of things, perhaps, than of facts. It infuriated him to think of me as being concerned about you or with you. I did not know he could be so angry, and his anger did not die, but for days it cast such a shadow over me that I used to wish I was dead. Only I would not disobey him, and now I am glad of that. We were in France three months, and then, coming home,

papa died. It was on the voyage. I wish he had asked me to forgive him, for then I think I could have remembered him with more tenderness. But he did nothing of the kind. He did not seem to think he had done wrong in any way, though I feel that some way we might have saved you. I am back here in Chicago in the old home. But I shall not stay in this house. It is so large and lonesome, and I always see you and father facing each other angrily there in the parlor when I enter it. So I am going to get me some cosey rooms in another part of the city, and take my aunt, who is a sweet old lady, to live with me; and I am going to devote my time — all of it — and all of my brains to getting you out of that terrible place. What is the use of telling me that you are a murderer? Do I not know you could not be brought to hurt anything? I suppose you must have killed that poor man, but then it was not you, it was that dreadful drink — it was Me! That is what continually haunts me. If I had been a braver girl, and spoken the words that were in my heart, you would not have gone into

that place. You would be innocent to-day. It was I who was responsible for it all. I let father kill your heart right there before me, and never said a word. Yet I knew how it was with you, and — this is what I ought to have said then, and what I must say now — and all the time I felt just as you did. I thought I should die when I saw you go away, and knew you would never come back again. Only I was so selfish, I was so wicked, I would say nothing.

"I have no right to be comfortable and hopeful, and to have friends, with you shut up from liberty and happiness. I will not have those comfortable rooms, after all. I will live as you do. I will live alone in a bare room. For it is I who am guilty! And then I will feel that I also am being punished.

"Do you hate me? Perhaps my telling you now all these things, and that I felt toward you just as you did toward me, will not make you happy. For it may be that you despise me.

"Anyway, I have told you the truth now. I will go as soon as I hear from you to a

lawyer, and try to find out how you may be liberated. I am sure it can be done when the facts are known.

"Poor boy! How I do hope you have known in your heart that I was not forgetting you. Indeed, day or night, I have thought of nothing else. Now I am free to help you. And be sure, whatever happens, that I am working for you.

"ZOE LE BARON."

That was all. Just a girlish, constrained letter, hardly hinting at the hot tears that had been shed for many weary nights, coyly telling of the impatient young love and all the maidenly shame.

David permitted himself to read it only once. Then a sudden resolution was born — a heroic one. Before he got the letter he was a crushed and unsophisticated boy; when he had read it, and absorbed its full significance, he became suddenly a man, capable of a great sacrifice.

"I return your letter," he wrote, without superscription, "and thank you for your anxiety about me. But the truth is, I had

forgotten all about you in my trouble. You were not in the least to blame for what happened. I might have known I would come to such an end. You thought I was good, of course; but it is not easy to find out the life of a young man. It is rather mortifying to have a private letter sent here, because the warden reads them all. I hope you will enjoy yourself this winter, and hasten to forget one who had certainly forgotten you till reminded by your letter, which I return.

"Respectfully,

"DAVID CULROSS."

That night some deep lines came into his face which never left it, and which made him look like a man of middle age.

He never doubted that his plan would succeed; that, piqued and indignant at his ingratitude, she would hate him, and in a little time forget he ever lived, or remember him only to blush with shame at her past association with him. He saw her happy, loved, living the usual life of women, with all those things that make life rich.

For there in the solitude an understand-

ing of deep things came to him. He who thought never to have a wife grew to know what the joy of it must be. He perceived all the subtle rapture of wedded souls. He learned what the love of children was, the pride of home, the unselfish ambition for success that spurs men on. All the emotions passed in procession at night before him, tricked out in palpable forms.

A burst of girlish tears would dissipate whatever lingering pity Zoe felt for him. How often he said that! With her sensitiveness she would be sure to hate a man who had mortified her.

So he fell to dreaming of her again as moving among happy and luxurious scenes, exquisitely clothed, with flowers on her bosom and jewels on her neck; and he saw men loving her, and was glad, and saw her at last loving the best of them, and told himself in the silence of the night that it was as he wished.

Yet always, always, from weary week to weary week, he rehearsed the scenes. They were his theatre, his opera, his library, his lecture hall.

He rehearsed them again there on the cars. He never wearied of them. To be sure, other thoughts had come to him at night. Much that to most men seems complex and puzzling had grown to appear simple to him. In a way his brain had quickened and deepened through the years of solitude. He had thought out a great many things. He had read a few good books and digested them, and the visions in his heart had kept him from being bitter.

Yet, suddenly confronted with liberty, turned loose like a pastured colt, without master or rein, he felt only confusion and dismay. He might be expected to feel exultation. He experienced only fright. It is precisely the same with the liberated colt.

The train pulled into a bustling station, in which the multitudinous noises were thrown back again from the arched iron roof. The relentless haste of all the people was inexpressibly cruel to the man who looked from the window wondering whither he would go, and if, among all the thousands that made up that vast and throbbing city, he would ever find a friend.

For a moment David longed even for that unmaternal mother who had forgotten him in the hour of his distress; but she had been dead for many years.

The train stopped. Every one got out. David forced himself to his feet and followed. He had been driven back into the world. It would have seemed less terrible to have been driven into a desert. He walked toward the great iron gates, seeing the people and hearing the noises confusedly.

As he entered the space beyond the grating some one caught him by the arm. It was a little middle-aged woman in plain clothes, and with sad gray eyes.

"Is this David?" said she.

He did not speak, but his face answered her.

"I knew you were coming to-day. I've waited all these years, David. You did n't think I believed what you said in that letter did you? This way, David, — this is the way home."

Two Pioneers

10

Two Pioneers

IT was the year of the small-pox. The Pawnees had died in their cold tepees by the fifties, the soldiers lay dead in the trenches without the fort, and many a gay French voyageur, who had thought to go singing down the Missouri on his fur-laden raft in the springtime, would never again see the lights of St. Louis, or the coin of the mighty Choteau company.

It had been a winter of tragedies. The rigors of the weather and the scourge of the disease had been fought with Indian charm and with Catholic prayer. Both were equally unavailing. If a man was taken sick at the fort they put him in a warm room, brought him a jug of water once a day, and left him to find out what his constitution was worth. Generally he recovered; for the surgeon's supplies had

been exhausted early in the year. But the Indians, in their torment, rushed into the river through the ice, and returned to roll themselves in their blankets and die in ungroaning stoicism.

Every one had grown bitter and hard. The knives of the trappers were sharp, and not one whit sharper than their tempers. Some one said that the friendly Pawnees were conspiring with the Sioux, who were always treacherous, to sack the settlement. The trappers doubted this. They and the Pawnees had been friends many years, and they had together killed the Sioux in four famous battles on the Platte. Yet — who knows? There was pestilence in the air, and it had somehow got into men's souls as well as their bodies.

So, at least, Father de Smet said. He alone did not despair. He alone tried neither charm nor curse. He dressed him an altar in the wilderness, and he prayed at it — but not for impossible things. When in a day's journey you come across two lodges of Indians, sixty souls in each, lying dead and distorted from the plague in their

desolate tepees, you do not pray, if you are a man like Father de Smet. You go on to the next lodge where the living yet are, and teach them how to avoid death.

Besides, when you are young, it is much easier to act than to pray. When the children cried for food, Father de Smet took down the rifle from the wall and went out with it, coming back only when he could feed the hungry. There were places where the prairie was black with buffalo, and the shy deer showed their delicate heads among the leafless willows of the Papillion. When they — the children — were cold, this young man brought in baskets of buffalo chips from the prairie and built them a fire, or he hung more skins up at the entrance to the tepees. If he wanted to cross a river and had no boat at hand, he leaped the uncertain ice, or, in clear current, swam, with his clothes on his head in a bundle.

A wonderful traveller for the time was Father de Smet. Twice he had gone as far as the land of the Flathead nation, and he could climb mountain passes as well as any guide of the Rockies. He had built a dozen

missions, lying all the way from the Columbia to the Kaw. He had always a jest at his tongue's end, and served it out with as much readiness as a prayer; and he had, withal, an arm trained to do execution. Every man on the plains understood the art of self-preservation. Even in Cainsville, over by the council ground of the western tribes, which was quite the most civilized place for hundreds of miles, life was uncertain when the boats came from St. Louis with bad whiskey in their holds. But no one dared take liberties with the holy father. The thrust from his shoulder was straight and sure, and his fist was hard.

Yet it was not the sinner that Father de Smet meant to crush. He always supplemented his acts of physical prowess with that explanation. It was the sin that he struck at from the shoulder — and may not even an anointed one strike at sin?

Father de Smet could draw a fine line, too, between the things which were bad in themselves, and the things which were only extrinsically bad. For example, there were the soups of Mademoiselle Ninon. Mam'selle

herself was not above reproach, but her soups were. Mademoiselle Ninon was the only Parisian thing in the settlement. And she was certainly to be avoided — which was perhaps the reason that no one avoided her. It was four years since she had seen Paris. She was sixteen then, and she followed the fortunes of a certain adventurer who found it advisable to sail for Montreal. Ninon had been bored back in Paris, it being dull in the mantua-making shop of Madame Guittar. If she had been a man she would have taken to navigation, and might have made herself famous by sailing to some unknown part of the New World. Being a woman, she took a lover who was going to New France, and forgot to weep when he found an early and violent death. And there were others at hand, and Ninon sailed around the cold blue lakes, past Sault St. Marie, and made her way across the portages to the Mississippi, and so down to the sacred rock of St. Louis. That was a merry place. Ninon had fault to find neither with the wine nor the dances. They were all that one could have desired, and there was no limit to either of them.

But still, after a time, even this grew tiresome to one of Ninon's spirit, and she took the first opportunity to sail up the Missouri with a certain young trapper connected with the great fur company, and so found herself at Cainsville, with the blue bluffs rising to the east of her, and the low white stretches of the river flats undulating down to where the sluggish stream wound its way southward capriciously.

Ninon soon tired of her trapper. For one thing she found out that he was a coward. She saw him run once in a buffalo fight. That was when the Pawnee stood still with a blanket stretched wide in a gaudy square, and caught the head of the mad animal fairly in the tough fabric; his mustang's legs trembled under him, but he did not move, — for a mustang is the soul of an Indian, and obeys each thought; the Indian himself felt his heart pounding at his ribs; but once with that garment fast over the baffled eyes of the struggling brute, the rest was only a matter of judicious knife-thrusts. Ninon saw this. She rode past her lover, and snatched the twisted bullion

cord from his hat that she had braided and put there, and that night she tied it on the hat of the Pawnee who had killed the buffalo.

The Pawnees were rather proud of the episode, and as for the Frenchmen, they did not mind. The French have always been very adaptable in America. Ninon was universally popular.

And so were her soups.

Every man has his price. Father de Smet's was the soups of Mademoiselle Ninon. Fancy! If you have an educated palate and are obliged to eat the strong distillation of buffalo meat, cooked in a pot which has been wiped out with the greasy petticoat of a squaw! When Ninon came down from St. Louis she brought with her a great box containing neither clothes, furniture, nor trinkets, but something much more wonderful! It was a marvellous compounding of spices and seasonings. The aromatic liquids she set before the enchanted men of the settlement bore no more relation to ordinary buffalo soup than Chateaubrand's Indian maidens did to one of the Pawnee girls, who slouched about the settle-

ment with noxious tresses and sullen slavish coquetries.

Father de Smet would not at any time have called Ninon a scarlet woman. But when he ate the dish of soup or tasted the hot corn-cakes that she invariably invited him to partake of as he passed her little house, he refrained with all the charity of a true Christian and an accomplished epicure from even thinking her such. And he remembered the words of the Saviour, "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone."

To Father de Smet's healthy nature nothing seemed more superfluous than sin. And he was averse to thinking that any committed deeds of which he need be ashamed. So it was his habit, especially if the day was pleasant and his own thoughts happy, to say to himself when he saw one of the wild young trappers leaving the cabin of Mademoiselle Ninon: "He has been for some of the good woman's hot cakes," till he grew quite to believe that the only attractions that the adroit Frenchwoman possessed were of a gastronomic nature.

To tell the truth, the attractions of Mademoiselle Ninon were varied. To begin with, she was the only thing in that wilderness to suggest home. Ninon had a genius for home-making. Her cabin, in which she cooked, slept, ate, lived, had become a boudoir.

The walls were hung with rare and beautiful skins; the very floor made rich with huge bear robes, their permeating odors subdued by heavy perfumes brought, like the spices, from St. Louis. The bed, in daytime, was a couch of beaver-skins; the fireplace had branching antlers above it, on which were hung some of the evidences of the fair Ninon's coquetry, such as silken scarfs, of the sort the voyageurs from the far north wore; and necklaces made by the Indians of the Pacific coast and brought to Ninon by — but it is not polite to inquire into these matters. There were little moccasins also, much decorated with porcupine-quills, one pair of which Father de Smet had brought from the Flathead nation, and presented to Ninon that time when she nursed him through a frightful run of fever.

She would take no money for her patient services.

"Father," said she, gravely, when he offered it to her, "I am not myself virtuous. But I have the distinction of having preserved the only virtuous creature in the settlement for further usefulness. Sometimes, perhaps, you will pray for Ninon."

Father de Smet never forgot those prayers.

These were wild times, mind you. No use to keep your skirts coldly clean if you wished to be of help. These men were subduing a continent. Their primitive qualities came out. Courage, endurance, sacrifice, suffering without complaint, friendship to the death, indomitable hatred, unfaltering hope, deep-seated greed, splendid gayety — it takes these things to subdue a continent. Vice is also an incidental, — that is to say, what one calls vice. This is because it is the custom to measure these men as if they were governed by the laws of civilization, where there is neither law nor civilization.

This much is certain: gentlemen cannot conquer a country. They tried gentlemen

back in Virginia, and they died, partly from lack of intellect, but mostly from lack of energy. After the yeomen have fought the conquering fight, it is well enough to bring in gentlemen, who are sometimes clever lawmakers, and who look well on thrones or in presidential chairs.

But to return to the winter of the small-pox. It was then that the priest and Ninon grew to know each other well. They became acquainted first in the cabin where four of the trappers lay tossing in delirium. The horrible smell of disease weighted the air. Outside wet snow fell continuously and the clouds seemed to rest only a few feet above the sullen bluffs. The room was bare of comforts, and very dirty. Ninon looked about with disgust.

"You pray," said she to the priest, "and I will clean the room."

"Not so," returned the broad-shouldered father, smilingly, "we will both clean the room." Thus it came that they scrubbed the floor together, and made the chimney so that it would not smoke, and washed the blankets on the beds, and kept the wood-

pile high. They also devised ventilators, and let in fresh air without exposing the patients. They had no medicine, but they continually rubbed the suffering men with bear's grease.

"It 's better than medicine," said Ninon, after the tenth day, as, wan with watching, she held the cool hand of one of the recovering men in her own. "If we had had medicines we should have killed these men."

"You are a woman of remarkable sense," said the holy father, who was eating a dish of corn-meal and milk that Ninon had just prepared, "and a woman also of Christian courage."

"Christian courage?" echoed Ninon; "do you think that is what you call it? I am not afraid, no, not I; but it is not Christian courage. You mistake in calling it that." There were tears in her eyes. The priest saw them.

"God lead you at last into peaceful ways," said he, softly, lifting one hand in blessing. "Your vigil is ended. Go to your home and sleep. You know the value of the temporal life that God has given to man.

In the hours of the night, Ninon, think of the value of eternal life, which it is also His to give."

Ninon stared at him a moment with a dawning horror in her eyes.

Then she pointed to the table.

"Whatever you do," said she, "don't forget the bear's grease." And she went out laughing. The priest did not pause to recommend her soul to further blessing. He obeyed her directions.

March was wearing away tediously. The river was not yet open, and the belated boats with needed supplies were moored far down the river. Many of the reduced settlers were dependent on the meat the Indians brought them for sustenance. The mud made the roads almost impassable; for the frost lay in a solid bed six inches below the surface, and all above that was semi-liquid muck. Snow and rain alternated, and the frightful disease did not cease its ravages.

The priest got little sleep. Now he was at the bed of a little half-breed child, smoothing the straight black locks from

the narrow brow; now at the cot of some hulking trapper, who wept at the pain, but died finally with a grin of bravado on his lips; now in a foul tepee, where some grave Pawnee wrapped his mantle about him, and gazed with prophetic and unflinching eyes into the land of the hereafter.

The little school that the priest started had been long since abandoned. It was only the preservation of life that one thought of in these days. And recklessness had made the men desperate. To the ravages of disease were added horrible murders. Moral health is always low when physical health is so.

Give a nation two winters of grippe, and it will have an epidemic of suicide. Give it starvation and small-pox, and it will have a contagion of murders. There are subtle laws underlying these things, — laws which the physicians think they can explain; but they are mistaken. The reason is not so material as it seems.

But spring was near in spite of falling snow and the dirty ice in the river. There was not even a flushing of the willow twigs

to tell it by, nor a clearing of the leaden sky, — only the almanac. Yet all men were looking forward to it. The trappers put in the feeble days of convalescence, making long rafts on which to pile the skins dried over winter, — a fine variety, worth all but their weight in gold. Money was easily got in those days; but there are circumstances under which money is valueless.

Father de Smet thought of this the day before Easter, as he plunged through the mud of the winding street in his bearskin gaiters. Stout were his legs, firm his lungs, as he turned to breathe in the west wind; clear his sharp and humorous eyes. He was going to the little chapel where the mission school had previously been held. Here was a rude pulpit, and back of it a much-disfigured virgin, dressed in turkey-red calico. Two cheap candles in their tin sticks guarded this figure, and beneath, on the floor, was spread an otter-skin of perfect beauty. The seats were of pine, without backs, and the wind whistled through the chinks between the logs. Moreover, the

place was dirty. Lenten service had been out of the question. The living had neither time nor strength to come to worship; and the dead were not given the honor of a burial from church in these times of terror. The priest looked about him in dismay, the place was so utterly forsaken; yet to let Easter go by without recognition was not to his liking. He had been the night before to every house in the settlement, bidding the people to come to devotions on Sunday morning. He knew that not one of them would refuse his invitation. There was no hero larger in the eyes of these unfortunates than the simple priest who walked among them with his unpretentious piety. The promises were given with whispered blessings, and there were voices that broke in making them, and hands that shook with honest gratitude. The priest, remembering these things, and all the awful suffering of the winter, determined to make the service symbolic, indeed, of the resurrection and the life, — the annual resurrection and life that comes each year, a palpable miracle, to teach the dullest that God reigns.

"How are you going to trim the altar?" cried a voice behind him.

He turned, startled, and in the doorway stood Mademoiselle Ninon, her short skirt belted with a red silk scarf, — the token of some trapper, — her ankles protected with fringed leggins, her head covered with a beribboned hat of felt, such as the voyageurs wore.

"Our devotions will be the only decorations we can hang on it. But gratitude is better than blossoms, and humanity more beautiful than green wreaths," said the father, gently.

It was a curious thing, and one that he had often noticed himself; he gave this woman — unworthy as she was — the best of his simple thoughts.

Ninon tiptoed toward the priest with one finger coquettishly raised to insure secrecy.

"You will never believe it," she whispered, "no one would believe it! But the fact is, father, I have two lilies."

"Lilies," cried the priest, incredulously, "two lilies?"

"That's what I say, father — two marvel-

lously fair lilies with little sceptres of gold in them, and leaves as white as snow. The bulbs were brought me last autumn by ——; that is to say, they were brought from St. Louis. Only now have they blossomed. Heavens, how I have watched the buds! I have said to myself every morning for a fortnight: 'Will they open in time for the good father's Easter morning service?' Then I said: 'They will open too soon. Buds,' I have cried to them, 'do not dare to open yet, or you will be horribly passée by Easter. Have the kindness, will you, to save yourselves for a great event.' And they did it; yes, father, you may not believe, but no later than this morning these sensible flowers opened up their leaves boldly, quite conscious that they were doing the right thing, and to-morrow, if you please, they will be here. And they will perfume the whole place; yes."

She stopped suddenly, and relaxed her vivacious expression for one of pain.

"You are certainly ill," cried the priest. "Rest yourself." He tried to push her on to one of the seats; but a sort of convulsive

rigidity came over her, very alarming to look at.

"You are worn out," her companion said gravely. "And you are chilled."

"Yes, I 'm cold," confessed Ninon. "But I had to come to tell you about the lilies. But, do you see, I never could bring myself to put them in this room as it is now. It would be too absurd to place them among this dirt. We must clean the place."

"The place will be cleaned. I will see to it. But as for you, go home and care for yourself." Ninon started toward the door with an uncertain step. Suddenly she came back.

"It is too funny," she said, "that red calico there on the Virgin. Father, I have some laces which were my mother's, who was a good woman, and which have never been worn by me. They are all I have to remember France by and the days when I was — different. If I might be permitted —" she hesitated and looked timidly at the priest.

"'She hath done what she could,'" murmured Father de Smet, softly. "Bring your laces, Ninon." He would have added:

"Thy sins be forgiven thee." But unfortunately, at this moment, Pierre came lounging down the street, through the mud, fresh from Fort Laramie. His rifle was slung across his back, and a full game-bag revealed the fact that he had amused himself on his way. His curly and wind-bleached hair blew out in time-torn banners from the edge of his wide hat. His piercing, black eyes were those of a man who drinks deep, fights hard, and lives always in the open air. Wild animals have such eyes, only there is this difference: the viciousness of an animal is natural; at least one-half of the viciousness of man is artificial and devised.

When Ninon saw the frost-reddened face of this gallant of the plains, she gave a little cry of delight, and the color rushed back into her face. The trapper saw her, and gave a rude shout of welcome. The next moment, he had swung her clear of the chapel steps; and then the two went down the street together, Pierre pausing only long enough to doff his hat to the priest.

"The Virgin will wear no fresh laces," said the priest, with some bitterness; but he

was mistaken. An hour later, Ninon was back, not only with a box of laces, but also with a collection of cosmetics, with which she proceeded to make startling the scratched and faded face of the wooden Virgin, who wore, after the completion of Ninon's labors, a decidedly piquant and saucy expression. The very manner in which the laces were draped had a suggestion of Ninon's still unforgotten art as a maker of millinery, and was really a very good presentment of Paris fashions four years past. Pierre, meantime, amused himself by filling up the chinks in the logs with fresh mud, — a commodity of which there was no lack, — and others of the neighbors, incited by these extraordinary efforts, washed the dirt from seats, floor, and windows, and brought furs with which to make presentable the floor about the pulpit.

Father de Smet worked harder than any of them. In his happy enthusiasm he chose to think this energy on the part of the others was prompted by piety, though well he knew it was only a refuge from the insufferable ennui that pervaded the place. Ninon suddenly came up to him with a white face.

"I am not well," she said. Her teeth were chattering, and her eyes had a little blue glaze over them. "I am going home. In the morning I will send the lilies."

The priest caught her by the hand.

"Ninon," he whispered, "it is on my soul not to let you go to-night. Something tells me that the hour of your salvation is come. Women worse than you, Ninon, have come to lead holy lives. Pray, Ninon, pray to the Mother of Sorrows, who knows the sufferings and sins of the heart." He pointed to the befrilled and highly fashionable Virgin with her rouge-stained cheeks.

Ninon shrank from him, and the same convulsive rigidity he had noticed before, held her immovable. A moment later, she was on the street again, and the priest, watching her down the street, saw her enter her cabin with Pierre.

. . . . . .

It was past midnight when the priest was awakened from his sleep by a knock on the door. He wrapped his great buffalo-coat about him, and answered the summons. Without in the damp darkness stood Pierre.

"Father," he cried, "Ninon has sent for you. Since she left you, she has been very ill. I have done what I could; but now she hardly speaks, but I make out that she wants you." Ten minutes later, they were in Ninon's cabin. When Father de Smet looked at her he knew she was dying. He had seen the Indians like that many times during the winter. It was the plague, but driven in to prey upon the system by the exposure. The Parisienne's teeth were set, but she managed to smile upon her visitor as he threw off his coat and bent over her. He poured some whiskey for her; but she could not get the liquid over her throat.

"Do not," she said fiercely between those set white teeth, "do not forget the lilies." She sank back and fixed her glazing eyes on the antlers, and kept them there watching those dangling silken scarfs, while the priest, in haste, spoke the words for the departing soul.

The next morning she lay dead among those half barbaric relics of her coquetry, and two white lilies with hearts of gold shed perfume from an altar in a wilderness.

Up the Gulch

Up the Gulch

"GO West?" sighed Kate. "Why, yes! I 'd like to go West."

She looked at the babies, who were playing on the floor with their father, and sighed again.

"You 've got to go somewhere, you know, Kate. It might as well be west as in any other direction. And this is such a chance! We can't have mamma lying around on sofas without any roses in her cheeks, can we?" He put this last to the children, who, being yet at the age when they talked in "Early English," as their father called it, made a clamorous but inarticulate reply.

Major Shelly, the grandfather of these very young persons, stroked his mustache and looked indulgent.

"Show almost human intelligence, don't they?" said their father, as he lay flat on

his back and permitted the babies to climb over him.

"Ya-as," drawled the major. "They do. Don't see how you account for it, Jack."

Jack roared, and the lips of the babies trembled with fear.

Their mother said nothing. She was on the sofa, her hands lying inert, her eyes fixed on her rosy babies with an expression which her father-in-law and her husband tried hard not to notice.

It was not easy to tell why Kate was ailing. Of course, the babies were young, but there were other reasons.

"I believe you 're too happy," Jack sometimes said to her. "Try not to be quite so happy, Kate. At least, try not to take your happiness so seriously. Please don't adore me so; I 'm only a commonplace fellow. And the babies — they 're not going to blow away."

But Kate continued to look with intense eyes at her little world, and to draw into it with loving and generous hands all who were willing to come.

"Kate is just like a kite," Jack explained

to his father, the major; "she can't keep afloat without just so many bobs."

Kate's "bobs" were the unfortunates she collected around her. These absorbed her strength. She felt their misery with sympathies that were abnormal. The very laborer in the streets felt his toil less keenly than she, as she watched the drops gather on his brow.

"Is life worth keeping at the cost of a lot like that?" she would ask. She felt ashamed of her own ease. She apologized for her own serene and perfect happiness. She even felt sorry for those mothers who had not children as radiantly beautiful as her own.

"Kate must have a change," the major had given out. He was going West on business and insisted on taking her with him. Jack looked doubtful. He was n't sure how he would get along without Kate to look after everything. Secretly, he had an idea that servants were a kind of wild animal that had to be fed by an experienced keeper. But when the time came, he kissed her good-by in as jocular a manner as he

could summon, and refused to see the tears that gathered in her eyes.

Until Chicago was reached, there was nothing very different from that which Kate had been in the habit of seeing. After that, she set herself to watch for Western characteristics. She felt that she would know them as soon as she saw them.

"I expected to be stirred up and shocked," she explained to the major. But somehow, the Western type did not appear. Commonplace women with worn faces — browned and seamed, though not aged — were at the stations, waiting for something or some one. Men with a hurried, nervous air were everywhere. Kate looked in vain for the gayety and heartiness which she had always associated with the West.

After they got beyond the timber country and rode hour after hour on a tract smooth as a becalmed ocean, she gave herself up to the feeling of immeasurable vastness which took possession of her. The sun rolled out of the sky into oblivion with a frantic, headlong haste. Nothing softened the aspect of its wrath. Near, red, familiar, it seemed

to visibly bowl along the heavens. In the morning it rose as baldly as it had set. And back and forth over the awful plain blew the winds, — blew from east to west and back again, strong as if fresh from the chambers of their birth, full of elemental scents and of mighty murmurings.

"This is the West!" Kate cried, again and again.

The major listened to her unsmilingly. It always seemed to him a waste of muscular energy to smile. He did not talk much. Conversation had never appealed to him in the light of an art. He spoke when there was a direction or a command to be given, or an inquiry to be made. The major, if the truth must be known, was material. Things that he could taste, touch, see, appealed to him. He had been a volunteer in the civil war, — a volunteer with a good record, — which he never mentioned; and, having acquitted himself decently, let the matter go without asking reprisal or payment for what he had freely given. He went into business and sold cereal foods.

"I believe in useful things," the major

expressed himself. "Oatmeal, wheat, — men have to have them. God intended they should. There 's Jack — my son — Jack Shelly — lawyer. What 's the use of litigation? God did n't design litigation. It does n't do anybody any good. It is n't justice you get. It 's something entirely different, — a verdict according to law. They say Jack 's clever. But I 'm mighty glad I sell wheat."

He did n't sell it as a speculator, however. That was n't his way.

"I earn what I make," he often said; and he had grown rich in the selling of his wholesome foods.

. . . . . .

Helena lies among round, brown hills. Above it is a sky of deep and illimitable blue. In the streets are crumbs of gold, but it no longer pays to mine for these; because, as real estate, the property is more valuable. It is a place of fictitious values. There is excitement in the air. Men have the faces of speculators. Every laborer is patient at his task because he cherishes a hope that some day he will be a million-

naire. There is hospitality, and cordiality and good fellowship, and an undeniable democracy. There is wealth and luxurious living. There is even culture, — but it is obtruded as a sort of novelty; it is not accepted as a matter of course.

Kate and the major were driven over two or three miles of dusty, hard road to a distant hotel, which stands in the midst of greenness, — in an oasis. Immediately above the green sward that surrounds it the brown hills rise, the grass scorched by the sun.

Kate yielded herself to the almost absurd luxury of the place with ease and complacency. She took kindly to the great verandas. She adapted herself to the elaborate and ill-assorted meals. She bathed in the marvellous pool, warm with the heat of eternal fires in mid-earth. This pool was covered with a picturesque Moorish structure, and at one end a cascade tumbled, over which the sun, coming through colored windows, made a mimic prism in the white spray. The life was not unendurable. The major was seldom with her, being obliged

to go about his business; and Kate amused herself by driving over the hills, by watching the inhabitants, by wondering about the lives in the great, pretentious, unhomelike houses with their treeless yards and their closed shutters. The sunlight, white as the glare on Arabian sands, penetrated everywhere. It seemed to fairly scorch the eye-balls.

"Oh, we 're West, now," Kate said, exultantly. "I 've seen a thousand types. But yet — not quite *the* type — not the impersonation of simplicity and daring that I was looking for."

The major did n't know quite what she was talking about. But he acquiesced. All he cared about was to see her grow stronger; and that she was doing every day. She was growing amazingly lovely, too, — at least the major thought so. Every one looked at her; but that was, perhaps, because she was such a sylph of a woman. Beside the stalwart major, she looked like a fairy princess.

One day she suddenly realized the fact that she had had a companion on the

veranda for several mornings. Of course, there were a great many persons — invalids, largely — sitting about, but one of them had been obtruding himself persistently into her consciousness. It was not that he was rude; it was only that he was thinking about her. A person with a temperament like Kate's could not long be oblivious to a thing like that; and she furtively observed the offender with that genius for psychological perception which was at once her greatest danger and her charm.

The man was dressed with a childish attempt at display. His shirt-front was decorated with a diamond, and his cuff-buttons were of onyx with diamond settings. His clothes were expensive and perceptibly new, and he often changed his costumes, but with a noticeable disregard for propriety. He was very conscious of his silk hat, and frequently wiped it with a handkerchief on which his monogram was worked in blue.

When the 'busses brought up their loads, he was always on hand to watch the newcomers. He took a long time at his din-

ners, and appeared to order a great deal and eat very little. There were card-rooms and a billiard-hall, not to mention a bowling-alley and a tennis-court, where the other guests of the hotel spent much time. But this man never visited them. He sat often with one of the late reviews in his hand, looking as if he intended giving his attention to it at any moment. But after he had scrupulously cut the leaves with a little carved ivory paper-cutter, he sat staring straight before him with the book open, but unread, in his hand.

Kate took more interest in this melancholy, middle-aged man than she would have done if she had not been on the outlook for her Western type, — the man who was to combine all the qualities of chivalry, daring, bombast, and generosity, seasoned with piquant grammar, which she firmly believed to be the real thing. But notwithstanding this kindly and somewhat curious interest, she might never have made his acquaintance if it had not been for a rather unpleasant adventure.

The major was "closing up a deal" and

had hurried away after breakfast, and Kate, in the luxury of convalescence, half-reclined in a great chair on the veranda and watched the dusky blue mist twining itself around the brown hills. She was not thinking of the babies; she was not worrying about home; she was not longing for anything, or even indulging in a dream. That vacuous content which engrosses the body after long indisposition, held her imperatively. Suddenly she was aroused from this happy condition of nothingness by the spectacle of an enormous bull-dog approaching her with threatening teeth. She had noticed the monster often in his kennel near the stables, and it was well understood that he was never to be permitted his freedom. Now he walked toward her with a solid step and an alarming deliberateness. Kate sat still and tried to assure herself that he meant no mischief, but by the time the great body had made itself felt on the skirt of her gown she could restrain her fear no longer, and gave a nervous cry of alarm. The brute answered with a growl. If he had lacked provocation before, he considered that he had it now.

He showed his teeth and flung his detestable body upon her; and Kate felt herself growing dizzy with fear. But just then an arm was interposed and the dog was flung back. There was a momentary struggle. Some gentlemen came hurrying out of the office; and as they beat the dog back to its retreat, Kate summoned words from her parched throat to thank her benefactor.

It was the melancholy man with the new clothes. This morning he was dressed in a suit of the lightest gray, with a white marseilles waistcoat, over which his glittering chain shone ostentatiously. White tennis-shoes, a white rose in his buttonhole, and a white straw hat in his hand completed a toilet over which much time had evidently been spent. Kate noted these details as she held out her hand.

"I may have been alarmed without cause," she said; "but I was horribly frightened. Thank you so much for coming to my rescue. And I think, if you would add to your kindness by getting me a glass of water — "

When he came back, his hand was trembling a little; and as Kate looked up to

learn the cause, she saw that his face was flushed. He was embarrassed. She decided that he was not accustomed to the society of ladies. "Brutes like that dog ain't no place in th' world — that 's my opinion. There are some bad things we can't help havin' aroun'; but a bull-dog ain't one of 'em."

"I quite agree with you," Kate acquiesced, as she drank the water. "But as this is the first unpleasant experience of any kind that I have had since I came here, I don't feel that I have any right to complain."

"You 're here fur yur health?"

"Yes. And I am getting it. You 're not an invalid, I imagine?"

"No — no-op. I 'm here be — well, I 've thought fur a long time I 'd like t' stay at this here hotel."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I 've been up th' gulch these fifteen years. Bin livin' on a shelf of black rock. Th' sun got 'round 'bout ten. Could n't make a thing grow." The man was looking off toward the hills, with an expression

of deep sadness in his eyes. "Did n't never live in a place where nothin' 'd grow, did you? I took geraniums up thar time an' time agin. Red ones. Made me think of mother; she 's in Germany. Watered 'em mornin' an' night. Th' damned things died."

The oath slipped out with an artless unconsciousness, and there was a little moisture in his eyes. Kate felt she ought to bring the conversation to a close. She wondered what Jack would say if he saw her talking with a perfect stranger who used oaths! She would have gone into the house but for something that caught her eye. It was the hand of the man; that hand was a bludgeon. All grace and flexibility had gone out of it, and it had become a mere instrument of toil. It was seamed and misshapen; yet it had been carefully manicured, and the pointed nails looked fantastic and animal-like. A great seal-ring bore an elaborate monogram, while the little finger displayed a collection of diamonds and emeralds truly dazzling to behold. An impulse of humanity and a sort of artistic

curiosity, much stronger than her discretion, urged Kate to continue her conversation.

"What were you doing up the gulch?" she said.

The man leaned back in his chair and regarded her a moment before answering. He realized the significance of her question. He took it as a sign that she was willing to be friendly. A look of gratitude, almost tender, sprang into his eyes, — dull gray eyes, they were, with a kindliness for their only recommendation.

"Makin' my pile," he replied. "I 've been in these parts twenty years. When I come here, I thought I was goin' to make a fortune right off. I had all th' money that mother could give me, and I lost everything I had in three months. I went up th' gulch." He paused, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

There was something in his remark and the intonation which made Kate say softly:

"I suppose you 've had a hard time of it."

"Thar you were!" he cried. "Thar was th' rock — risin', risin', black! At th' bottom wus th' creek, howlin' day an'

night! Lonesome! Gee! No one t' talk to. Of course, th' men. Had some with me always. They did n't talk. It 's too — too quiet t' talk much. They played cards. Curious, but I never played cards. Don't think I 'd find it amusin'. No, I worked. Came down here once in six months or three months. Had t' come — grub-staked th' men, you know. Did you ever eat salt pork?" He turned to Kate suddenly with this question.

"Why, yes; a few times. Did you have it?"

"Nothin' else, much. I used t' think of th' things mother cooked. Mother understood cookin', if ever a woman did. I 'll never forget th' dinner she gave me th' day I came away. A woman ought t' cook. I hear American women don't go in much for cookin'."

"Oh, I think that 's a mistake," Kate hastened to interrupt. "All that I know understand how to serve excellent dinners. Of course, they may not cook them themselves, but I think they could if it were necessary."

"Hum!" He picked up a long glove that

had fallen from Kate's lap and fingered it before returning it.

"I s'pose you cook?"

"I make a specialty of salads and sorbets," smiled Kate. "I guess I could roast meat and make bread; but circumstances have not yet compelled me to do it. But I 've a theory that an American woman can do anything she puts her mind to."

The man laughed out loud, — a laugh quite out of proportion to the mild good humor of the remark; but it was evident that he could no longer conceal his delight at this companionship.

"How about raisin' flowers?" he asked. "Are you strong on that?"

"I 've only to look at a plant to make it grow," Kate cried, with enthusiasm. "When my friends are in despair over a plant, they bring it to me, and I just pet it a little, and it brightens up. I 've the most wonderful fernery you ever saw. It 's green, summer and winter. Hundreds of people stop and look up at it, it is so green and enticing, there above the city streets."

"What city?"

"Philadelphia."

"Mother 's jest that way. She has a garden of roses. And the mignonette — "

But he broke off suddenly, and sat once more staring before him.

"But not a damned thing," he added, with poetic pensiveness, "would grow in that gulch."

"Why did you stay there so long?" asked Kate, after a little pause in which she managed to regain her waning courage.

"Bad luck. You never see a place with so many false leads. To-day you 'd get a streak that looked big. To-morrow you 'd find it a pocket. One night I 'd go t' bed with my heart goin' like a race-horse. Next night it would be ploddin' along like a winded burro. Don't know what made me stick t' it. It was hot there, too! And cold! Always roastin' ur freezin'. It 'd been different if I 'd had any one t' help me stand it. But th' men were always findin' fault. They blamed me fur everythin'. I used t' lie awake at night an' hear 'em talkin' me over. It made me lonesome, I tell you! Thar was n't no one! Mother

used t' write. But I never told her th' truth. She ain't a suspicion of what I 've been a-goin' through."

Kate sat and looked at him in silence. His face was seamed, though far from old. His body was awkward, but impressed her with a sense of magnificent strength.

"I could n't ask no woman t' share my hard times," he resumed after a time. "I always said when I got a woman, it was goin' t' be t' make her happy. It wer' n't t' be t' ask her t' drudge."

There was another silence. This man out of the solitude seemed to be elated past expression at his new companionship. He looked with appreciation at the little pointed toes of Kate's slippers, as they glanced from below the skirt of her dainty organdie. He noted the band of pearls on her finger. His eyes rested long on the daisies at her waist. The wind tossed up little curls of her warm brown hair. Her eyes suffused with interest, her tender mouth seemed ready to lend itself to any emotion, and withal she was so small, so compact, so exquisite. The man wiped his forehead again, in mere exuberance.

"Here 's my card," he said, very solemnly, as he drew an engraved bit of pasteboard from its leather case. Kate bowed and took it.

"Mr. Peter Roeder," she read.

"I 've no card," she said. "My name is Shelly. I 'm here for my health, as I told you." She rose at this point, and held out her hand. "I must thank you once more for your kindness," she said.

His eyes fastened on hers with an appeal for a less formal word. There was something almost terrible in their silent eloquence.

"I hope we may meet again," she said.

Mr. Peter Roeder made a very low and awkward bow, and opened the door into the corridor for her.

That evening the major announced that he was obliged to go to Seattle. The journey was not an inviting one; Kate was well placed where she was, and he decided to leave her.

She was well enough now to take longer drives; and she found strange, lonely canyons, wild and beautiful, where yellow waters burst through rocky barriers with roar

and fury, — tortuous, terrible places, such as she had never dreamed of. Coming back from one of these drives, two days after her conversation on the piazza with Peter Roeder, she met him riding a massive roan. He sat the animal with that air of perfect unconsciousness which is the attribute of the Western man, and his attire, even to his English stock, was faultless, — faultily faultless.

"I hope you won't object to havin' me ride beside you," he said, wheeling his horse. To tell the truth, Kate did not object. She was a little dull, and had been conscious all the morning of that peculiar physical depression which marks the beginning of a fit of homesickness.

"The wind gits a fine sweep," said Roeder, after having obtained the permission he desired. "Now in the gulch we either had a dead stagnation, or else the wind was tearin' up and down like a wild beast."

Kate did not reply, and they went on together, facing the riotous wind.

"You can't guess how queer it seems t'

be here," he said, confidentially. "It seems t' me as if I had come from some other planet. Thar don't rightly seem t' be no place fur me. I tell you what it 's like. It 's as if I 'd come down t' enlist in th' ranks, an' found 'em full, — every man marchin' along in his place, an' no place left fur me."

Kate could not find a reply.

"I ain't a friend, — not a friend! I ain't complainin'. It ain't th' fault of any one — but myself. You don' know what a durned fool I 've bin. Someway, up thar in th' gulch I got t' seemin' so sort of important t' myself, and my makin' my stake seemed such a big thing, that I thought I had only t' come down here t' Helena t' have folks want t' know me. I did n't particular want th' money because it *wus* money. But out here you work fur it, jest as you work fur other things in other places, — jest because every one is workin' fur it, and it 's the man who gets th' most that beats. It ain't that they are any more greedy than men anywhere else. My pile 's a pretty good-sized one. An' it 's likely to

be bigger; but no one else seems t' care. Th' paper printed some pieces about it. Some of th' men came round t' see me; but I saw their game. I said I guessed I 'd look further fur my acquaintances. I ain't spoken to a lady, — not a real lady, you know, — t' talk with, friendly like, but you, fur — years."

His face flushed in that sudden way again. They were passing some of those pretentious houses which rise in the midst of Helena's ragged streets with such an extraneous air, and Kate leaned forward to look at them. The driver, seeing her interest, drew up the horses for a moment.

"Fine, fine!" ejaculated Roeder. "But they ain't got no garden. A house don't seem anythin' t' me without a garden. Do you know what I think would be th' most beautiful thing in th' world? A baby in a rose-garden! Do you know, I ain't had a baby in my hands, excep' Ned Ramsey's little kid, once, for ten year!"

Kate's face shone with sympathy.

"How dreadful!" she cried. "I could n't live without a baby about."

"Like babies, do you? Well, well. Boys? Like boys?"

"Not a bit better than girls," said Kate, stoutly.

"I like boys," responded Roeder, with conviction. "My mother liked boys. She had three girls, but she liked me a damned sight the best."

Kate laughed outright.

"Why do you swear?" she said. "I never heard a man swear before, — at least, not one with whom I was talking. That 's one of your gulch habits. You must get over it."

Roeder's blond face turned scarlet.

"You must excuse me," he pleaded. "I 'll cure myself of it! Jest give me a chance."

This was a little more personal than Kate approved of, and she raised her parasol to conceal her annoyance. It was a brilliant little fluff of a thing which looked as if it were made of butterflies' wings. Roeder touched it with awe.

"You have sech beautiful things," he said. "I did n't know women wore sech

nice things. Now that dress — it 's like — I don't know what it 's like." It was a simple little taffeta, with warp and woof of azure and of cream, and gay knots of ribbon about it.

"We have the advantage of men," she said. "I often think one of the greatest drawbacks to being a man would be the sombre clothes. I like to wear the prettiest things that can be found."

"Lace?" queried Roeder. "Do you like lace?"

"I should say so! Did you ever see a woman who did n't?"

"Hu—um! These women I 've known don't know lace, — these wives of th' men out here. They 're th' only kind I 've seen this long time."

"Oh, of course, but I mean — "

"I know what you mean. My mother has a chest full of linen an' lace. She showed it t' me th' day I left. 'Peter,' she said, ' some day you bring a wife home with you, an' I 'll give you that lace an' that linen.' An' I 'm goin' t' do it, too," he said quietly.

"I hope so," said Kate, with her eyes

moist. "I hope you will, and that your mother will be very happy."

. . . . . .

There was a hop at the hotel that night, and it was almost a matter of courtesy for Kate to go. Ladies were in demand, for there were not very many of them at the hotel. Every one was expected to do his best to make it a success; and Kate, not at all averse to a waltz or two, dressed herself for the occasion with her habitual striving after artistic effect. She was one of those women who make a picture of themselves as naturally as a bird sings. She had an opal necklace which Jack had given her because, he said, she had as many moods as an opal had colors; and she wore this with a crépe gown, the tint of the green lights in her necklace. A box of flowers came for her as she was dressing; they were Puritan roses, and Peter Roeder's card was in the midst of them. She was used to having flowers given her. It would have seemed remarkable if some one had not sent her a bouquet when she was going to a ball.

"I shall dance but twice," she said to

those who sought her for a partner. "Neither more nor less."

"Ain't you goin' t' dance with me at all?" Roeder managed to say to her in the midst of her laughing altercation with the gentlemen.

"Dance with you!" cried Kate. "How do men learn to dance when they are up a gulch?"

"I ken dance," he said stubbornly. He was mortified at her chaffing.

"Then you may have the second waltz," she said, in quick contrition. "Now you other gentlemen have been dancing any number of times these last fifteen years. But Mr. Roeder is just back from a hard campaign, — a campaign against fate. My second waltz is his. And I shall dance my best."

It happened to be just the right sort of speech. The women tried good-naturedly to make Roeder's evening a pleasant one. They were filled with compassion for a man who had not enjoyed the society of their sex for fifteen years. They found much amusement in leading him through the square

dances, the forms of which were utterly unknown to him. But he waltzed with a sort of serious alertness that was not so bad as it might have been.

Kate danced well. Her slight body seemed as full of the spirit of the waltz as a thrush's body is of song. Peter Roeder moved along with her in a maze, only half-answering her questions, his gray eyes full of mystery.

Once they stopped for a moment, and he looked down at her, as with flushed face she stood smiling and waving her gossamer fan, each motion stirring the frail leaves of the roses he had sent her.

"It's cur'ous," he said softly, "but I keep thinkin' about that black gulch."

"Forget it," she said. "Why do you think of a gulch when —" She stopped with a sudden recollection that he was not used to persiflage. But he anticipated what she was about to say.

"Why think of the gulch when you are here?" he said. "Why, because it is only th' gulch that seems real. All this, — these pleasant, polite people, this beautiful room,

th' flowers everywhere, and you, and me as I am, seem as if I was dreamin'. Thar ain't anything in it all that is like what I thought it would be."

"Not as you thought it would be?"

"No. Different. I thought it would be — well, I thought th' people would not be quite so high-toned. I hope you don't mind that word."

"Not in the least," she said. "It 's a musical term. It applies very well to people."

They took up the dance again and waltzed breathlessly till the close. Kate was tired; the exertion had been a little more than she had bargained for. She sat very still on the veranda under the white glare of an electric ball, and let Roeder do the talking. Her thoughts, in spite of the entertainment she was deriving from her present experiences, would go back to the babies. She saw them tucked well in bed, each in a little iron crib, with the muslin curtains shielding their rosy faces from the light. She wondered if Jack were reading alone in the library or was at the club, or perhaps at the summer concert, with the swell of the violins in his

ears. Jack did so love music. As she thought how delicate his perceptions were, how he responded to everything most subtle in nature and in art, of how life itself was a fine art with him, and joy a thing to be cultivated, she turned with a sense of deep compassion to the simple man by her side. His rough face looked a little more unattractive than usual. His evening clothes were almost grotesque. His face wore a look of solitude, of hunger.

"What were you saying?" she said, dreamily. "I beg your pardon."

"I was sayin' how I used t' dream of sittin' on the steps of a hotel like this, and not havin' a thing t' do. When I used t' come down here out of the gulch, and see men who had had good dinners, an' good baths, sittin' around smokin', with money t' go over there t' th' bookstan' an' get anythin' they 'd want, it used t' seem t' me about all a single man could wish fur."

"Well, you 've got it all now."

"But I did n't any of th' time suppose that would satisfy a man long. Only I was so darned tired I could n't help wantin' t'

rest. But I 'm not so selfish ur s' narrow as to be satisfied with *that.* No, I 'm not goin' t' spend m' pile that way — quite!"

He laughed out loud, and then sat in silence watching Kate as she lay back wearily in her chair.

"I 've got t' have that there garden," he said, laughingly. "Got t' get them roses. An' I 'll have a big bath-house, — plenty of springs in this country. You ken have a bath here that won't freeze summer *nor* winter. An' a baby! I've got t' have a baby. He 'll go with th' roses an' th' bath." He laughed again heartily.

"It's a queer joke, isn't it?" Roeder asked. "Talkin' about my baby, an' I have n't even a wife." His face flushed and he turned his eyes away.

"Have I shown you the pictures of my babies?" Kate inquired. "You 'd like my boy, I know. And my girl is just like me, — in miniature."

There was a silence. She looked up after a moment. Roeder appeared to be examining the monogram on his ring as if he had never seen it before.

"I did n't understand that you were married," he said gently.

"Did n't you? I don't think you ever called me by any name at all, or I should have noticed your mistake and set you right. Yes, I 'm married. I came out here to get strong for the babies."

"Got a boy an' a girl, eh?"

"Yes."

"How old 's th' boy?"

"Five."

"An' th' girl?"

"She 'll soon be four."

"An' yer husband — he 's livin'?"

"I should say so! I 'm a very happy woman, Mr. Roeder. If only I were stronger!"

"Yer lookin' much better," he said, gravely, "than when you come. You 'll be all right."

The moon began to come up scarlet beyond the eastern hills. The two watched it in silence. Kate had a feeling of guilt, as if she had been hurting some helpless thing.

"I was in hopes," he said, suddenly, in a

voice that seemed abrupt and shrill, "thet you 'd see fit t' stay here."

"Here in Helena? Oh, no!"

"I was thinkin' I 'd offer you that two hundred thousand dollars, if you 'd stay."

"Mr. Roeder! You don't mean — surely — "

"Why, yes. Why not?" He spoke rather doggedly. "I 'll never see no other woman like you. You 're different from others. How good you 've been t' me!"

"Good! I 'm afraid I 've been very bad — at least, very stupid."

"I say, now — your husband 's good t' you, ain't he?"

"He is the kindest man that ever lived."

"Oh, well, I did n't know."

A rather awkward pause followed which was broken by Roeder.

"I don't see jest what I 'm goin' t' do with that thar two hundred thousand dollars," he said, mournfully.

"Do with it? Why, live with it! Send some to your mother."

"Oh, I 've done that. Five thousand dollars. It don't seem much here; but it 'll

seem a lot t' her. I 'd send her more, only it would 've bothered her."

"Then there is your house, — the house with the bath-room. But I suppose you 'll have other rooms?"

Peter laughed a little in spite of himself.

"I guess I won't have a house," he said. "An' I could n't make a garden alone."

"Hire a man to help you." Kate was trembling, but she kept talking gayly. She was praying that nothing very serious would happen. There was an undercurrent of sombreness in the man's manner that frightened her.

"I guess I 'll jest have t' keep on dreamin' of that boy playin' with th' roses."

"No, no," cried Kate; "he will come true some day! I know he 'll come true."

Peter got up and stood by her chair.

"You don't know nothin' about it," he said. "You don't know, an' you can't know what it 's bin t' me t' talk with you. Here I come out of a place where there ain't no sound but the water and the pines. Years come an' go. Still no sound. Only thinkin', thinkin', thinkin'! Missin' all

th' things men care fur! Dreamin' of a time when I sh'd strike th' pile. Then I seed home, wife, a boy, flowers, everythin'. You 're so beautiful, an' you 're so good. You 've a way of pickin' a man's heart right out of him. First time I set my eyes on you I thought you were th' nicest thing I ever see! And how little you are! That hand of yours, — look at it, — it 's like a leaf! An' how easy you smile. Up th' gulch we did n't smile; we laughed, but gen'ly because some one got in a fix. Then your voice! Ah, I 've thought fur years that some day I might hear a voice like that! Don't you go! Sit still! I 'm not blamin' you fur anythin' ; but I may never, 's long 's I live, find any one who will understand things th' way you understand 'em. Here! I tell you about that gulch an' you see that gulch. You know how th' rain sounded thar, an' how th' shack looked, an' th' life I led, an' all th' thoughts I had, an' th' long nights, an' th' times when — but never mind. I know you know it all. I saw it in yer eyes. I tell you of mother, an' you see 'er. You

know 'er old German face, an' 'er proud ways, an' her pride in me, an' how she would think I wuz awfully rich. An' you see how she would give out them linens, all marked fur my wife, an' how I would sit an' watch her doin' it, an' — you see everything. I know you do. I could feel you doin' it. Then I say to myself: 'Here is th' one woman in th' world made fur me. Whatever I have, she shall have. I 'll spend my life waitin' on her. She 'll tell me all th' things I ought t' know, an' hev missed knowin'; she 'll read t' me; she 'll be patient when she finds how dull I 've grown. And thar 'll be th' boy — ' "

He seized her hand and wrung it, and was gone. Kate saw him no more that night.

The next morning the major returned. Kate threw her arms around his neck and wept.

"I want the babies," she explained when the major showed his consternation. "Don't mind my crying. You ought to be used to seeing me cry by this time. I must get home, that 's all. I must see Jack."

So that night they started.

At the door of the carriage stood Peter Roeder, waiting.

"I 'm going t' ride down with you," he said. The major looked nonplussed.

Kate got in and the major followed.

"Come," she said to Roeder. He sat opposite and looked at her as if he would fasten her image on his mind.

"You remember," he said after a time, "that I told you I used t' dream of sittin' on the veranda of th' hotel and havin' nothin' t' do?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't think I care fur it. I 've had a month of it. I 'm goin' back up th' gulch."

"No!" cried Kate, instinctively reaching out her hands toward him.

"Why not? I guess you don't know me. I knew that somewhere I 'd find a friend. I found that friend; an' now I 'm alone again. It 's pretty quiet up thar in the gulch; but I 'll try it."

"No, no. Go to Europe; go to see your mother."

"I thought about that a good deal, a

while ago. But I don't seem t' have no heart fur it now. I feel as if I 'd be safer in th' gulch."

"Safer?"

"The world looks pretty big. It 's safe and close in th' gulch."

At the station the major went to look after the trunks, and Roeder put Kate in her seat.

"I wanted t' give you somethin'," he said, seating himself beside her, "but I did n't dare."

"Oh, my dear friend," she cried, laying her little gloved hand on his red and knotted one, "don't go back into the shadow. Do not return to that terrible silence. Wait. Have patience. Fate has brought you wealth. It will bring you love."

"I 've somethin' to ask," he said, paying no attention to her appeal. "You must answer it. If we 'a' met long ago, an' you had n't a husband or — anythin' — do you think you 'd 've loved me then?"

She felt herself turning white.

"No," she said softly. "I could never have loved you, my dear friend. We are

not the same. Believe me, there is a woman somewhere who will love you; but I am not that woman — nor could I have ever been."

The train was starting. The major came bustling in.

"Well, good-by," said Roeder, holding out his hand to Kate.

"Good-by," she cried. "Don't go back up the gulch."

"Oh," he said, reassuringly, "don't you worry about me, my — don't worry. The gulch is a nice, quiet place. An' you know what I told you about th' ranks all bein' full. Good-by." The train was well under way. He sprang off, and stood on the platform waving his handkerchief.

"Well, Kate," said the major, seating himself down comfortably and adjusting his travelling cap, "did you find the Western type?"

"I don't quite know," said she, slowly. "But I have made the discovery that a human soul is much the same wherever you meet it."

"Dear me! You haven't been meeting

a soul, have you?" the major said, facetiously, unbuckling his travelling-bag. "I 'll tell Jack."

"No, I 'll tell Jack. And he 'll feel quite as badly as I do to think that I could do nothing for its proper adjustment."

The major's face took on a look of comprehension.

"Was that the soul," he asked, "that just came down in the carriage with us?"

"That was it," assented Kate. "It was born; it has had its mortal day; and it has gone back up the gulch."

A Michigan Man

A Michigan Man

A PINE forest is nature's expression of solemnity and solitude. Sunlight, rivers, cascades, people, music, laughter, or dancing could not make it gay. With its unceasing reverberations and its eternal shadows, it is as awful and as holy as a cathedral.

Thirty good fellows working together by day and drinking together by night can keep up but a moody imitation of jollity. Spend twenty-five of your forty years, as Luther Dallas did, in this perennial gloom, and your soul — that which enjoys, aspires, competes — will be drugged as deep as if you had quaffed the cup of oblivion. Luther Dallas was counted one of the most experienced axe-men in the northern camps. He could fell a tree with the swift surety of an executioner, and in revenge for his many

arboral murders the woodland had taken captive his mind, captured and chained it as Prospero did Ariel. The resounding footsteps of Progress driven on so mercilessly in this mad age could not reach his fastness. It did not concern him that men were thinking, investigating, inventing. His senses responded only to the sonorous music of the woods; a steadfast wind ringing metallic melody from the pine-tops contented him as the sound of the sea does the sailor; and dear as the odors of the ocean to the mariner were the resinous scents of the forest to him. Like a sailor, too, he had his superstitions. He had a presentiment that he was to die by one of these trees, — that some day, in chopping, the tree would fall upon and crush him as it did his father the day they brought him back to the camp on a litter of pine boughs.

One day the gang-boss noticed a tree that Dallas had left standing in a most unwoodmanlike manner in the section which was allotted to him.

"What in thunder is that standing there for?" he asked.

Dallas raised his eyes to the pine, towering in stern dignity a hundred feet above them.

"Well," he said feebly, "I noticed it, but kind-a left it t' the last."

"Cut it down to-morrow," was the response.

The wind was rising, and the tree muttered savagely. Luther thought it sounded like a menace, and turned pale. No trouble has yet been found that will keep a man awake in the keen air of the pineries after he has been swinging his axe all day, but the sleep of the chopper was so broken with disturbing dreams that night that the beads gathered on his brow, and twice he cried aloud. He ate his coarse flap-jacks in the morning and escaped from the smoky shanty as soon as he could.

"It 'll bring bad luck, I 'm afraid," he muttered as he went to get his axe from the rack. He was as fond of his axe as a soldier of his musket, but to-day he shouldered it with reluctance. He felt like a man with his destiny before him. The tree stood like a sentinel. He raised his axe, once,

twice, a dozen times, but could not bring himself to make a cut in the bark. He walked backwards a few steps and looked up. The funereal green seemed to grow darker and darker till it became black. It was the embodiment of sorrow. Was it not shaking giant arms at him? Did it not cry out in angry challenge? Luther did not try to laugh at his fears; he had never seen any humor in life. A gust of wind had someway crept through the dense barricade of foliage that flanked the clearing, and struck him with an icy chill. He looked at the sky; the day was advancing rapidly. He went at his work with an energy as determined as despair. The axe in his practised hand made clean straight cuts in the trunk, now on this side, now on that. His task was not an easy one, but he finished it with wonderful expedition. After the chopping was finished, the tree stood firm a moment; then, as the tensely-strained fibres began a weird moaning, he sprang aside, and stood waiting. In the distance he saw two men hewing a log. The axe-man sent them a shout and threw up his arms for them to

look. The tree stood out clear and beautiful against the gray sky; the men ceased their work and watched it. The vibrations became more violent, and the sounds they produced grew louder and louder till they reached a shrill wild cry. There came a pause, then a deep shuddering groan. The topmost branches began to move slowly, the whole stately bulk swayed, and then shot towards the ground. The gigantic trunk bounded from the stump, recoiled like a cannon, crashed down, and lay conquered, with a roar as of an earthquake, in a cloud of flying twigs and chips.

When the dust had cleared away, the men at the log on the outside of the clearing could not see Luther. They ran to the spot, and found him lying on the ground with his chest crushed in. His fearful eyes had not rightly calculated the distance from the stump to the top of the pine, nor rightly weighed the power of the massed branches, and so, standing spell-bound, watching the descending trunk as one might watch his Nemesis, the rebound came and left him lying worse than dead.

Three months later, when the logs, lopped of their branches, drifted down the streams, the woodman, a human log lopped of his strength, drifted to a great city. A change, the doctor said, might prolong his life. The lumbermen made up a purse, and he started out, not very definitely knowing his destination. He had a sister, much younger than himself, who at the age of sixteen had married and gone, he believed, to Chicago. That was years ago, but he had an idea that he might find her. He was not troubled by his lack of resources; he did not believe that any man would want for a meal unless he were "shiftless." He had always been able to turn his hand to something.

He felt too ill from the jostling of the cars to notice much of anything on the journey. The dizzy scenes whirling past made him faint, and he was glad to lie with closed eyes. He imagined that his little sister in her pink calico frock and bare feet (as he remembered her) would be at the station to meet him. "Oh, Lu!" she would call from some hiding-place, and he would go and find her.

The conductor stopped by Luther's seat and said that they were in the city at last; but it seemed to the sick man as if they went miles after that, with a multitude of twinkling lights on one side and a blank darkness, that they told him was the lake, on the other. The conductor again stopped by his seat.

"Well, my man," said he, "how are you feeling?"

Luther, the possessor of the toughest muscles in the gang, felt a sick man's irritation at the tone of pity.

"Oh, I 'm all right!" he said, gruffly, and shook off the assistance the conductor tried to offer with his overcoat. "I 'm going to my sister's," he explained, in answer to the inquiry as to where he was going. The man, somewhat piqued at the spirit in which his overtures were met, left him, and Luther stepped on to the platform. There was a long vista of semi-light, down which crowds of people walked and baggage-men rushed. The building, if it deserved the name, seemed a ruin, and through the arched doors Luther could see men — hackmen —

dancing and howling like dervishes. Trains were coming and going, and the whistles and bells kept up a ceaseless clangor. Luther, with his small satchel and uncouth dress, slouched by the crowd unnoticed, and reached the street. He walked amid such an illumination as he had never dreamed of, and paused half blinded in the glare of a broad sheet of electric light that filled a pillared entrance into which many people passed. He looked about him. Above on every side rose great, many-windowed buildings; on the street the cars and carriages thronged, and jostling crowds dashed headlong among the vehicles. After a time he turned down a street that seemed to him a pandemonium filled with madmen. It went to his head like wine, and hardly left him the presence of mind to sustain a quiet exterior. The wind was laden with a penetrating moisture that chilled him as the dry icy breezes from Huron never had done, and the pain in his lungs made him faint and dizzy. He wondered if his red-cheeked little sister could live in one of those vast, impregnable buildings. He thought of

stopping some of those serious-looking men and asking them if they knew her; but he could not muster up the courage. The distressing experience that comes to almost every one some time in life, of losing all identity in the universal humanity, was becoming his. The tears began to roll down his wasted face from loneliness and exhaustion. He grew hungry with longing for the dirty but familiar cabins of the camp, and staggered along with eyes half closed, conjuring visions of the warm interiors, the leaping fires, the groups of laughing men seen dimly through clouds of tobacco-smoke.

A delicious scent of coffee met his hungry sense and made him really think he was taking the savory black draught from his familiar tin cup; but the muddy streets, the blinding lights, the cruel, rushing people, were still there. The buildings, however, now became different. They were lower and meaner, with dirty windows. Women laughing loudly crowded about the doors, and the establishments seemed to be equally divided between saloon-keepers,

pawnbrokers, and dealers in second-hand clothes. Luther wondered where they all drew their support from. Upon one sign-board he read, "Lodgings 10 cents to 50 cents. A Square Meal for 15 cents," and, thankful for some haven, entered. Here he spent his first night and other nights, while his purse dwindled and his strength waned. At last he got a man in a drug-store to search the directory for his sister's residence. They found a name he took to be his brother-in-law's. It was two days later when he found the address, — a great, many-storied mansion on one of the southern boulevards, — and found also that his search had been in vain. Sore and faint, he staggered back to his miserable shelter, only to arise feverish and ill in the morning. He frequented the great shop doors, thronged with brilliantly-dressed ladies, and watched to see if his little sister might not dash up in one of those satin-lined coaches and take him where he would be warm and safe and would sleep undisturbed by drunken, ribald songs and loathsome surroundings. There were days when he almost forgot his name,

and, striving to remember, would lose his senses for a moment and drift back to the harmonious solitudes of the North and breathe the resin-scented frosty atmosphere. He grew terrified at the blood he coughed from his lacerated lungs, and wondered bitterly why the boys did not come to take him home.

One day, as he painfully dragged himself down a residence street, he tried to collect his thoughts and form some plan for the future. He had no trade, understood no handiwork; he could fell trees. He looked at the gaunt, scrawny, transplanted specimens that met his eye, and gave himself up to the homesickness that filled his soul. He slept that night in the shelter of a stable, and spent his last money in the morning for a biscuit.

He travelled many miles that afternoon looking for something to which he might turn his hand. Once he got permission to carry a hod for half an hour. At the end of that time he fainted. When he recovered, the foreman paid him twenty-five cents. "For God's sake, man, go home," he said.

Luther stared at him with a white face and went on.

There came days when he so forgot his native dignity as to beg. He seldom received anything; he was referred to various charitable institutions the existence of which he had never heard.

One morning, when a pall of smoke enveloped the city and the odors of coal-gas refused to lift their nauseating poison through the heavy air, Luther, chilled with dew and famished, awoke to a happier life. The loneliness at his heart was gone. The feeling of hopeless imprisonment that the miles and miles of streets had terrified him with gave place to one of freedom and exaltation. Above him he heard the rasping of pine boughs; his feet trod on a rebounding mat of decay; the sky was as coldly blue as the bosom of Huron. He walked as if on ether, singing a senseless jargon the woodmen had aroused the echoes with, —

"Hi yi halloo!
The owl sees you!
Look what you do!
Hi yi halloo!"

Swung over his shoulder was a stick he had used to assist his limping gait, but now transformed into the beloved axe. He would reach the clearing soon, he thought, and strode on like a giant, while people hurried from his path. Suddenly a smooth trunk, stripped of its bark and bleached by weather, arose before him.

"Hi yi halloo!" High went the wasted arm — crash! — a broken staff, a jingle of wires, a maddened, shouting man the centre of a group of amused spectators! A few moments later, four broad-shouldered men in blue had him in their grasp, pinioned and guarded, clattering over the noisy streets behind two spirited horses. They drew after them a troop of noisy, jeering boys, who danced about the wagon like a swirl of autumn leaves. Then came a halt, and Luther was dragged up the steps of a square brick building with a belfry on the top. They entered a large bare room with benches ranged about the walls, and brought him before a man at a desk.

"What is your name?" asked the man at the desk.

"Hi yi halloo!" said Luther.

"He 's drunk, sergeant," said one of the men in blue, and the axe-man was led into the basement. He was conscious of an involuntary resistance, a short struggle, and a final shock of pain, — then oblivion.

The chopper awoke to the realization of three stone walls and an iron grating in front. Through this he looked out upon a stone flooring across which was a row of similar apartments. He neither knew nor cared where he was. The feeling of imprisonment was no greater than he had felt on the endless, cheerless streets. He laid himself on the bench that ran along a side wall, and, closing his eyes, listened to the babble of the clear stream and the thunder of the "drive" on its journey. How the logs hurried and jostled! crushing, whirling, ducking, with the merry lads leaping about them with shouts and laughter. Suddenly he was recalled by a voice. Some one handed a narrow tin cup full of coffee and a thick slice of bread through the grating. Across the way he dimly saw a man eating a similar slice of bread. Men in other com-

partments were swearing and singing. He knew these now for the voices he had heard in his dreams. He tried to force some of the bread down his parched and swollen throat, but failed; the coffee strangled him, and he threw himself upon the bench.

The forest again, the night-wind, the whistle of the axe through the air. Once when he opened his eyes he found it dark. It would soon be time to go to work. He fancied there would be hoar-frost on the trees in the morning. How close the cabin seemed! Ha! — here came his little sister. Her voice sounded like the wind on a spring morning. How loud it swelled now! "Lu! Lu!" she cried.

The next morning the lock-up keeper opened the cell door. Luther lay with his head in a pool of blood. His soul had escaped from the thrall of the forest.

"Well, well!" said the little fat police-justice, when he was told of it. "We ought to have a doctor around to look after such cases."

A Lady of Yesterday

A Lady of Yesterday

"A LIGHT wind blew from the gates of the sun," the morning she first walked down the street of the little Iowa town. Not a cloud flecked the blue; there was a humming of happy insects; a smell of rich and moist loam perfumed the air, and in the dusk of beeches and of oaks stood the quiet homes. She paused now and then, looking in the gardens, or at a group of children, then passed on, smiling in content.

Her accent was so strange, that the agent for real estate, whom she visited, asked her, twice and once again, what it was she said.

"I want," she had repeated smilingly, "an upland meadow, where clover will grow, and mignonette."

At the tea-tables that night, there was a mighty chattering. The brisk village made a mystery of this lady with the slow step,

the foreign trick of speech, the long black gown, and the gentle voice. The men, concealing their curiosity in presence of the women, gratified it secretly, by sauntering to the tavern in the evening. There the keeper and his wife stood ready to convey any neighborly intelligence.

"Elizabeth Astrado" was written in the register, — a name conveying little, unaccompanied by title or by place of residence.

"She eats alone," the tavern-keeper's wife confided to their eager ears, "and asks for no service. Oh, she 's a curiosity! She 's got her story, — you 'll see!"

In a town where every man knew every other man, and whether or not he paid his taxes on time, and what his standing was in church, and all the skeletons of his home, a stranger alien to their ways disturbed their peace of mind.

"An upland meadow where clover and mignonette will grow," she had said, and such an one she found, and planted thick with fine white clover and with mignonette. Then, while the carpenters raised her cabin at the border of the meadow, near the street,

she passed among the villagers, mingling with them gently, winning their good-will, in spite of themselves.

The cabin was of unbarked maple logs, with four rooms and a rustic portico. Then all the villagers stared in very truth. They, living in their trim and ugly little homes, accounted houses of logs as the misfortune of their pioneer parents. A shed for wood, a barn for the Jersey cow, a rustic fence, tall, with a high swinging gate, completed the domain. In the front room of the cabin was a fireplace of rude brick. In the bedrooms, cots as bare and hard as a nun's, and in the kitchen the domestic necessaries; that was all. The poorest house-holder in the town would not have confessed to such scant furnishing. Yet the richest man might well have hesitated before he sent to France for hives and hives of bees, as she did, setting them up along the southern border of her meadow.

Later there came strong boxes, marked with many marks of foreign transportation lines, and the neighbor-gossips, seeing them, imagined wealth of curious furniture;

but the man who carted them told his wife, who told her friend, who told her friend, that every box to the last one was placed in the dry cemented cellar, and left there in the dark.

"An' a mighty ridic'lous expense a cellar like that is, t' put under a house of that char'cter," said the man to his wife — who repeated it to her friend.

"But that ain't all," the carpenter's wife had said when she heard about it all, "Hank says there is one little room, not fit for buttery nor yet fur closit, with a window high up — well, you ken see yourself — an' a strong door. Jus' in passin' th' other day, when he was there, hangin' some shelves, he tried it, an' it was locked!"

"Well!" said the women who listened.

However, they were not unfriendly, these brisk gossips. Two of them, plucking up tardy courage, did call one afternoon. Their hostess was out among her bees, crooning to them, as it seemed, while they lighted all about her, lit on the flower in her dark hair, buzzed vivaciously about her snow-white linen gown, lighted on her long, dark hands.

She came in brightly when she saw her guests, and placed chairs for them, courteously, steeped them a cup of pale and fragrant tea, and served them with little cakes. Though her manner was so quiet and so kind, the women were shy before her. She, turning to one and then the other, asked questions in her quaint way.

"You have children, have you not?"

Both of them had.

"Ah," she cried, clasping those slender hands, "but you are very fortunate! Your little ones, — what are their ages?"

They told her, she listening smilingly.

"And you nurse your little babes — you nurse them at the breast?"

The modest women blushed. They were not used to speaking with such freedom. But they confessed they did, not liking artificial means.

"No," said the lady, looking at them with a soft light in her eyes, "as you say, there is nothing like the good mother Nature. The little ones God sends should lie at the breast. 'T is not the milk alone that they imbibe; it is the breath of life, —

it is the human magnetism, the power, — how shall I say? Happy the mother who has a little babe to hold!"

They wanted to ask a question, but they dared not — wanted to ask a hundred questions. But back of the gentleness was a hauteur, and they were still.

"Tell me," she said, breaking her reverie, "of what your husbands do. Are they carpenters? Do they build houses for men, like the blessed Jesus? Or are they tillers of the soil? Do they bring fruits out of this bountiful valley?"

They answered, with a reservation of approval. "The blessed Jesus!" It sounded like popery.

She had gone from these brief personal matters to other things.

"How very strong you people seem," she had remarked. "Both your men and your women are large and strong. You should be, being appointed to subdue a continent. Men think they choose their destinies, but indeed, good neighbors, I think not so. Men are driven by the winds of God's will. They are as much bidden to build up this

valley, this storehouse for the nations, as coral insects are bidden to make the reefs with their own little bodies, dying as they build. Is it not so?"

"We are the creatures of God's will, I suppose," said one of her visitors, piously.

She had given them little confidences in return.

"I make my bread," she said, with childish pride, "pray see if you do not think it excellent!" And she cut a flaky loaf to display its whiteness. One guest summoned the bravado to inquire, —

"Then you are not used to doing housework?"

"I?" she said, with a slow smile, "I have never got used to anything, — not even living." And so she baffled them all, yet won them.

The weeks went by. Elizabeth Astrado attended to her bees, milked her cow, fed her fowls, baked, washed, and cleaned, like the simple women about her, saving that as she did it a look of ineffable content lighted up her face, and she sang for happiness. Sometimes, amid the ballads that she

hummed, a strain slipped in of some great melody, which she, singing unaware, as it were, corrected, shaking her finger in self-reproval, and returning again to the ballads and the hymns. Nor was she remiss in neighborly offices; but if any were ailing, or had a festivity, she was at hand to assist, condole, or congratulate, carrying always some simple gift in her hand, appropriate to the occasion.

She had her wider charities too, for all she kept close to her home. When, one day, a story came to her of a laborer struck down with heat in putting in a culvert on the railroad, and gossip said he could not speak English, she hastened to him, caught dying words from his lips, whispered a reply, and then what seemed to be a prayer, while he held fast her hand, and sank to coma with wistful eyes upon her face. Moreover 't was she who buried him, raising a cross above his grave, and she who planted rose-bushes about the mound.

"He spoke like an Italian," said the physician to her warily.

"And so he was," she had replied.

"A fellow-countryman of yours, no doubt?"

"Are not all men our countrymen, my friend?" she said, gently. "What are little lines drawn in the imagination of men, dividing territory, that they should divide our sympathies? The world is my country — and yours, I hope. Is it not so?"

Then there had also been a hapless pair of lovers, shamed before their community, who, desperate, impoverished, and bewildered at the war between nature and society, had been helped by her into a new part of the world. There had been a widow with many children, who had found baskets of cooked food and bundles of well-made clothing on her step. And as the days passed, with these pleasant offices, the face of the strange woman glowed with an ever-increasing content, and her dark, delicate beauty grew.

John Hartington spent his vacation at Des Moines, having a laudable desire to see something of the world before returning to his native town, with his college honors fresh upon him. Swiftest of the college runners was John Hartington, famed for his

leaping too, and measuring widest at the chest and waist of all the hearty fellows at the university. His blond curls clustered above a brow almost as innocent as a child's; his frank and brave blue eyes, his free step, his mellow laugh, bespoke the perfect animal, unharmed by civilization, unperplexed by the closing century's fallacies and passions. The wholesome oak that spreads its roots deep in the generous soil, could not be more a part of nature than he. Conscientious, unimaginative, direct, sincere, industrious, he was the ideal man of his kind, and his return to town caused a flutter among the maidens which they did not even attempt to conceal. They told him all the chat, of course, and, among other things, mentioned the great sensation of the year, — the coming of the woman with her mystery, the purchase of the sunny upland, the planting it with clover and with mignonette, the building of the house of logs, the keeping of the bees, the barren rooms, the busy, silent life, the charities, the never-ending wonder of it all. And then the woman — kind, yet

different from the rest, with the foreign trick of tongue, the slow, proud walk, the delicate, slight hands, the beautiful, beautiful smile, the air as of a creature from another world.

Hartington, strolling beyond the village streets, up where the sunset died in daffodil above the upland, saw the little cot of logs, and out before it, among blood-red poppies, the woman of whom he had heard. Her gown of white gleamed in that eerie radiance, glorified, her sad great eyes bent on him in magnetic scrutiny. A peace and plenitude of power came radiating from her, and reached him where he stood, suddenly, and for the first time in his careless life, struck dumb and awed. She, too, seemed suddenly abashed at this great bulk of youthful manhood, innocent and strong. She gazed on him, and he on her, both chained with some mysterious enchantment. Yet neither spoke, and he, turning in bewilderment at last, went back to town, while she placed one hand on her lips to keep from calling him. And neither slept that night, and in the morning when she

went with milking pail and stool out to the grassy field, there he stood at the bars, waiting. Again they gazed, like creatures held in thrall by some magician, till she held out her hand and said, —

"We must be friends, although we have not met. Perhaps we *are* old friends. They say there have been worlds before this one. I have not seen you in these habiliments of flesh and blood, and yet — we may be friends?"

John Hartington, used to the thin jests of the village girls, and all their simple talk, rose, nevertheless, enlightened as he was with some strange sympathy with her, to understand and answer what she said.

"I think perhaps it may be so. May I come in beside you in the field? Give me the pail. I 'll milk the cow for you."

She threw her head back and laughed like a girl from school, and he laughed too, and they shook hands. Then she sat near him while he milked, both keeping silence, save for the p-rring noise he made with his lips to the patient beast. Being through,

she served him with a cupful of the fragrant milk; but he bade her drink first, then drank himself, and then they laughed again, as if they both had found something new and good in life.

Then she, —

"Come see how well my bees are doing." And they went. She served him with the lucent syrup of the bees, perfumed with the mignonette, — such honey as there never was before. He sat on the broad doorstep, near the scarlet poppies, she on the grass, and then they talked — was it one golden hour — or two? Ah, well, 't was long enough for her to learn all of his simple life, long enough for her to know that he was victor at the races at the school, that he could play the pipe, like any shepherd of the ancient days, and when he went he asked her if he might return.

"Well," laughed she, "sometimes I am lonely. Come see me — in a week."

Yet he was there that day at twilight, and he brought his silver pipe, and piped to her under the stars, and she sung ballads to him, — songs of Strephon and times

when the hills were young, and flocks were fairer than they ever be these days.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow," and still the intercourse, still her dark loveliness waxing, still the weaving of the mystic spell, still happiness as primitive and as sweet as ever Eden knew.

Then came a twilight when the sweet rain fell, and on the heavy air the perfumes of the fields floated. The woman stood by the window of the cot, looking out. Tall, graceful, full of that subtle power which drew his soul; clothed in white linen, fragrant from her fields, with breath freighted with fresh milk, with eyes of flame, she was there to be adored. And he, being man of manliest type, forgot all that might have checked the words, and poured his soul out at her feet. She drew herself up like a queen, but only that she might look queenlier for his sake, and, bending, kissed his brow, and whispered back his vows.

And they were married.

The villagers pitied Hartington.

"She 's more than a match for him in

years — an' in some other ways, as like as not," they said. "Besides, she ain't much inclined to mention anything about her past. 'T won't bear the tellin' probably."

As for the lovers, they laughed as they went about their honest tasks, or sat together arms encircling each at evening, now under the stars, and now before their fire of wood. They talked together of their farm, added a field for winter wheat, bought other cattle, and some horses, which they rode out over the rolling prairies side by side. He never stopped to chat about the town; she never ventured on the street without him by her side. Truth to tell, their neighbors envied them, marvelling how one could extract a heaven out of earth, and what such perfect joy could mean.

Yet, for all their prosperity, not one addition did they make to that most simple home. It stood there, with its bare necessities, made beautiful only with their love. But when the winter was most gone, he made a little cradle of hard wood, in which she placed pillows of down, and over which

she hung linen curtains embroidered by her hand.

In the long evenings, by the flicker of the fire, they sat together, cheek to cheek, and looked at this little bed, singing low songs together.

"This happiness is terrible, my John," she said to him one night, — a wondrous night, when the eastern wind had flung the tassels out on all the budding trees of spring, and the air was throbbing with awakening life, and balmy puffs of breeze, and odors of the earth. "And we are growing young. Do you not think that we are very young and strong?"

He kissed her on the lips. "I know that you are beautiful," he said.

"Oh, we have lived at Nature's heart, you see, my love. The cattle and the fowls, the honey and the wheat, the cot — the cradle, John, and you and me! These things make happiness. They are nature. But then, you cannot understand. You have never known the artificial — "

"And you, Elizabeth?"

"John, if you wish, you shall hear all I

have to tell. 'T is a long, long, weary tale. Will you hear it now? Believe me, it will make us sad."

She grasped his arm till he shrank with pain.

"Tell what you will and when you will, Elizabeth. Perhaps, some day — when — " he pointed to the little crib.

"As you say." And so it dropped.

There came a day when Hartington, sitting upon the portico, where perfumes of the budding clover came to him, hated the humming of the happy bees, hated the rustling of the trees, hated the sight of earth.

"The child is dead," the nurse had said, "as for your wife, perhaps — " but that was all. Finally he heard the nurse's step upon the floor.

"Come," she said, motioning him. And he had gone, laid cheek against that dying cheek, whispered his love once more, saw it returned even then, in those deep eyes, and laid her back upon her pillow, dead.

He buried her among the mignonette, levelled the earth, sowed thick the seed again.

"'T is as she wished," he said.

With his strong hands he wrenched the little crib, laid it piece by piece upon their hearth, and scattered then the sacred ashes on the wind. Then, with hard-coming breath, broke open the locked door of that room which he had never entered, thinking to find there, perhaps, some sign of that unguessable life of hers, but found there only an altar, with votive lamps before the Blessed Virgin, and lilies faded and fallen from their stems.

Then down into the cellar went he, to those boxes, with the foreign marks. And then, indeed, he found a hint of that dead life. Gowns of velvet and of silk, such as princesses might wear, wonders of lace, yellowed with time, great cloaks of snowy fur, lustrous robes, jewels of worth,—a vast array of brilliant trumpery. Then there were books in many tongues, with rich old bindings and illuminated page, and in them written the dead woman's name, — a name of many parts, with titles of impress, and in the midst of all the name, "Elizabeth Astrado," as she said.

And that was all, or if there were more he might have learned, following trails that fell within his way, he never learned it, being content, and thankful that he had held her for a time within his arms, and looked in her great soul, which, wearying of life's sad complexities, had simplified itself, and made his love its best adornment.

THE END

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